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Redesigning an American cafe based on an analysis of its expressionistic and cultural character

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Redesigning an American cafe based on an
analysis of its expressionistic and cultural character

by

Celina Hong

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department: Art and Design

Major: Art and Design (Interior Design)

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My reason for studying design in the United States is to learn about the American design process and theoretical thinking which I can use to interpret historical design in my home country, Hong Kong.

Hong Kong, a place where east meets west, has long been under the control of the British Government. Hong Kong has been influenced by western culture along with its traditional Chinese culture, and that has resulted in a richly diverse environment. Hong Kong has long been famous for its tourist industry and its spectacular neon lighting at night (known as the Orient Pearl). In addition to the diversity in clothing, jewelry, and inexpensive electrical appliances, Hong Kong is known for the diversity of its food industry. The people of Hong Kong are very materialistic. They are willing to spend most of their income on clothing and food, especially dining out. Because of intense competition, Hong Kong people are conscious of good design, from small packages to architecture. The corporate world as well as the restaurant industry is willing to pay for design that is attractive, interesting, and pleasant to the eyes of their customers. Of late, Hong Kong businesses have hired foreign designers and architects rather than local designers. By learning in America how to interpret a building's expression and culture, I will be better equip to incorporate attributes of both Chinese and western approaches in my design work. And, I hope that I will be able to overcome the preference which my country gives to foreign designers.

Statement of Intention

The intention of this thesis is to analyze an American cafe in terms of its culture, its expressionist meaning (both inside and outside), and its special type of food service.

As my subject for design analysis, I have chosen the Grove Cafe, which is located in downtown Ames. The reasons for choosing the Grove include: 1) its location as a main street building in a business district, 2) its regular clientele, 3) its longevity as a cafe type, and 4) its traditional cafe menu.

Plan of Presentation

I will review literature pertaining to my study in Chapter II. In Chapter III, I will define various categories of restaurant types and describe their historical evolution in America. The drawings in that chapter are based on ones from The Literary Digest (Coffee and In The Doggy Dog-Wagon, Feb. 20, 1932; An Eat-As-You-Go Lunchroom, Dec. 24, 1921); John Baeder, Gas, Food, & Lodging (New York: Abbeville Press, 1982); Alan Hess, Googie (Tokyo: Toppan Printing Co., 1985); The American Restaurant (Motormat Magic, Sept. 1949); as well as my own drawings based on my research and analysis.

In Chapter IV, I will trace the Grove's history, describe its physical condition and appearance, analyze its existential expression from a theoretical point of view, and offer impressions of its character as a cultural phenomenon.

In Chapter V, I will redesign the Grove, taking into account the design problems identified in Chapter IV. In the design stage, I will generate multiple images of ideas in order to explore architectural and symbolic meanings. Lastly, looking for its significance and meaning, I will explain my new design.

Methodology for Analysis

Three sources are used to analyze the selected cafe: perceptual theories of buildings and their special character from Thomas Thiis-Evensen, Archetypes in Architecture (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1987); cultural analysis from James Spradley and David McCurdy, Cultural Experience (U.S.A.: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1972) in which four learning tasks have been used to describe the culture found in the Grove; and Marvin Harris, Cultural Materialism which offers insight of customers' behavior, particularly their reasons for patronage.

Methodology for Generating Redesign

Three processes are used to redesign the existing cafe:

1. Creative thinking strategies which include manipulation (generating multiple images), abstraction (elements with symbolic meanings), and transformation (transferring symbolic meanings into the architecture).
2. Elements and principles of design are also examined. Elements include space, shape or form, mass, line, texture, pattern, light and

color. Principles include scale, proportion, balance, rhythm, emphasis, harmony or unity.

3. Release the existential expression and meaning of the interior space which include the front facade, back facade and the roof.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three basic categories of literature have been reviewed for a thorough analysis of my research subject: the evolution of the restaurant industry which includes definitions of building and types of food services; theoretical design frameworks concerned with the perception of form and meaning and their embedded existential meaning; and an analysis of a cafe as a culture.

Evolution of the Restaurant Industry

Several sources have been used to trace the history of the restaurant industry, but two of the most important were Philip Langdon, Orange Roofs, Golden Arches (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., 1986), which provided a historical study of the origins of the restaurant industry and examined design aspects that made restaurants appealing to millions of customers, and Alan Hess, Googie, Fifties Coffee Shop Architecture (Tokyo: Toppan Printing Co., 1985), that focused on the streamlined architecture of California coffee shops. The journals I found to be helpful included a variety of sources: trade magazines (Fountain Service, American Restaurant); a professional journal (Arts and Architecture); and scholarly journals (Journal of American Culture and The Literary Digest).

Langdon set forth the premise that all restaurants have consistently embodied the spirit of their times. He speculated that before World War I, the architecture of the food industry (in terms of

colors, textures, materials and shapes) was far different from that of the 1960s. Aesthetic changes in restaurants influenced the character of communities all across the United States, where the boisterous shapes, colors and the expressions of signs added up to the overall personality of restaurants.

Not only had the evolution of chain restaurants become an intriguing subject in itself; it also displayed potential for illuminating the history of roadside commercial buildings in general.¹

According to Langdon, a vast number of businesses along America's highways had undergone a "metamorphosis," and it was their progressive change that gave American cities, suburbs, and towns their vivid character.

The fifties coffee shops described in Hess's Googie was clearly part of the metamorphosis that Langdon described. Hess focused on documenting coffee shops located primarily in the western communities or business routes of Los Angeles and Fresno, California; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada; and through the center of smaller towns like Barstow, Visalia, and Merced, California. It was the unique humor and vernacular character of the coffee shops that interested Hess:

There is a place for humor in the architectural environment; sometimes fleeting and sometimes a little

¹ Philip Langdon, Orange Roofs, Golden Arches (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1986), x, xi.

more permanent--such as a hot dog stand in the shape of a hot dog; and if we are not careful, we may remove our opportunity to appreciate the unexpected humor implicit in our pluralistic society.²

Although cultural expression plays an important role in architecture, in Hess's view, 1950s coffee shops were effective because of other architectural standards: functional problems of a car-oriented building were solved imaginatively; scale and form created an urban strip architecture; complex interior geometries represented an understanding of modern spatial concepts; and, consequently, the appearance of cities changed nationwide, which all added up to an interesting landscape on American highways. Coffee shops were not only modern in a stylistic sense, but they were also widely popular with the public, a rare combination in the history of Modernism.³ The coffee shop can be classified as a vernacular building type because it used a common design language of the public streets which was understood by a large cross section of the population.

The journals, The Literary Digest and Journal of American Culture, provided in-depth and scholarly descriptions of the evolution of various restaurant industries before the 1930s. Illustrations were shown along with the text, giving me a more in-depth understanding of the evolution of architectural forms and the exterior aesthetics employed by the restaurant industries through time. Also cited in both journals were:

² Alan Hess, Googie, Fifties Coffee Shop Architecture (Tokyo: Toppan Printing Co., 1985), 8.

³ Hess, 10-11.

the types of patrons, the food that was served, and an average cost per meal. Articles, such as "From Pushcart to Modular Restaurant: The Diner on the Landscape," from the Journal of American Culture offered insight about restaurants of the 1920s decade. These articles charged inexpensive prices for food, but also hinted at friendly relationships among the owners, waitresses and customers. An informal atmosphere encouraged small groups of conversation, leading the "served" and "the serving" to become better acquainted with one another.

Historical trade journals such as The American Restaurant and Fountain Service provided articles about the impact of technology in the restaurant industry, particularly the introduction of new machines and new materials that promoted sanitation. These articles spoke of the intensive use of machinery in the restaurant industries which limited human contact, promoted a faster turn-over, and also led some of the restaurants (that are machine or technological oriented) into extinction. Among these articles, "Motormat Magic," described food dispersion by means of a track which was delivered to drivers in cars.

Peter Growland's "Coffee Shops" article from Arts and Architecture, focused on restaurant industries, particularly those in California that were built along the roadside to take advantage of the booming car industry.

Theoretical Design Framework

I have used Thomas Thiis-Evensen's Archetypes in Architecture to analyze the embedded design meaning found in the Grove cafe. Thiis-

Evensen is interested in the existential design expression of architectural spaces. In order to "plan" for specific architectural effects, the first condition for such planning is that the designer must state an intention and seek a theoretical approach appropriate for such intention.

Thiis-Evensen describes three basic elements (archetypes) of architecture: the floor, the wall and the roof, which can be divided into four elements: major forms, construction system, surface treatment, and openings (defined by Thiis-Evensen as themes and motifs). Themes are related to the functions of the elements while motifs suggest how the elements do their jobs, that is, specific interpretations within each of the themes. As a result, the terms, motion, weight and substance, are used to describe the existential expression of architecture, to predict the emotional content of a building. In order to be acquainted with the expressive potential of a form, a theory of archetypes must have two goals: the first is to "classify" the archetypes in a concentrated overview, and the second is an attempt to "describe" them in order to point out the potential expression which exists within them.⁴

Thiis-Evensen believes that existential expression of a building's form is the basis for symbolic meanings. With a more precise knowledge of the archetypes and their variations, it is possible to replace the schematic architecture of recent years without reverting to the copying of motifs from the past. In addition, the emotional content

⁴ Thomas Thiis-Evensen, Archetypes in Architecture (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1987), 17-19.

of architecture can replace the generally subjective feelings of the qualities of buildings.

Cultural Analysis

Three sources helped me to form observations about the cultural character of the Grove cafe: James Spradley and David McCurdy, The Cultural Experience (U.S.A.: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1972); Marvin Harris, Cultural Materialism (New York: Random House, Inc., 1980); and Marvin Harris, The Rise of Anthropological Theory (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968).

In The Cultural Experience, James Spradley and David McCurdy describe a culture in its own terms. The aim of ethnographic semantics is to discover the characteristic way in which people categorize (an invention of ways to classify and organize experience), code (the use of symbols), and define (definition of the situation) their own experience. Careful study of informants' language (definitions of interpretations) have always been the hallmark of good ethnographic fieldwork. By clearly distinguishing between the investigator's culture, and the one he is studying, the investigator can become more keenly aware of his own ethnocentrism, and, from there, to learn from it.⁵

Spradley and McCurdy suggested four important learning tasks in analyzing one's culture. These tasks are:

⁵ James Spradley and David McCurdy, The Cultural Experience (U.S.A.: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1972), vii.

- 1) acquiring conceptual tools (understanding the cultural concept and learning some field work methods);
- 2) entering the field (selecting a cultural scene and making contacts with informants);
- 3) doing field work (gathering and recording cultural data);
- 4) describing a culture (analyzing the data and writing a cultural description).

My impressions of the Grove were based on these techniques. During my visits, I observed verbal and non-verbal communications between the owners and patrons, and interviewed the owners and customers regarding their purposes for frequenting the cafe and their perceptions. To further my understanding of the Grove as a culture, I recorded casual conversations among those who ate there, and I interacted with people by participating in their activities in their context.

To gain an understanding of informants' language, I turned to Marvin Harris's Cultural Materialism, in which he describes emic (from the suffix of the word phonemic) as:

a logico-empirical system whose phenomenal distinctions are built up out of contrasts and discriminations which are significant, meaningful, real, accurate, or in some other fashion regarded as appropriate by the actors themselves. An emic statement can be falsified if it can be shown that it contradicts the cognitive calculus by which relevant actors judge that entities are similar or different, real, meaningful,

significant, or in some other sense appropriate or acceptable.⁶

Harris describes etic (from the suffix of the word phonetic) as:

a statement that cannot be falsified if they do not conform to the actor's notion of what is significant, real, meaningful, or appropriate. Etic statements are verified when independent observers using similar operations agree that a given event has occurred.⁷

Harris believes that cultural materialism leads to better scientific theories about the causes of sociocultural phenomena than any of the rival strategies that are currently available, and its task is to create a pan-human science of society whose findings can be accepted on logical and evidentiary grounds by the human community.⁸ For example, in Trivandwan district of the state of Kerala, in southern India, Harris interviewed farmers about the cause of death of their domestic cattle, and found out that the mortality rate of male calves tended to be almost twice as high as the mortality rate of female calves. When farmers were asked about this unbalanced mortality ratio, they would insist that no actions were deliberately carried to shorten the life of any animals and that, all calves had the right to live. The emics of the situation were that no one knowingly or willingly would shorten the life of a calf, but the etics of the situation were that cattle sex ratios were systematically

⁶ Marvin Harris, The Rise of Anthropological Theory (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), 571.

⁷ Harris, 575.

⁸ Marvin Harris, Cultural Materialism (New York: Random House, 1980), xi, xii.

adjusted to the needs of the local ecology and economy through preferential male bovicide.

CHAPTER III

THE CAFE IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

This chapter focuses on an overview of various restaurant types, in order to provide a historical context for the cafe as an institution.

Competition in the food business has always been keen and certain time periods have played pivotal roles in its evolution as an industry, as well as its architecture. Compared to my home country, where restaurant design is not likely to be affected by a certain style or trend, (but more likely to be restricted by the amount of square footage available), it has always been fascinating for me to see the architectural diversity found in the United States, where designs are more flexible in terms of site and playfulness of form.

In America, prior to 1870, peddlers sold lunches from baskets suspended from their shoulders or necks, but by the mid 1870s, the pedestrian food peddler was replaced by a pushcart or a horse-drawn wagon. A horse-drawn wagon, (sometimes referred to as a lunch cart), was a four-wheeled vehicle from which light meals were served (Figure 1). Sandwiches, slices of pie, beverages, and a few other items, were served through an open window which was also called a "dog wagon" because of its success of hot dog sales. Some horse-drawn wagons operated from dusk till dawn, others only during daylight hours, dispensing food near factories, ball parks, race tracks, and other places where people worked or congregated. The horse-drawn wagon's sign (which was hand-painted), was the only means of attracting pedestrian

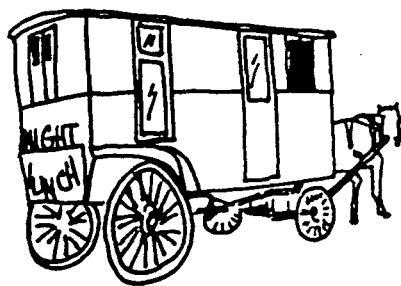


Figure 1 A four-wheeled horse-drawn wagon (adapted from The Literary Digest, 1932, 43)

customers.⁹ By 1884, horse-drawn wagons were widened so that customers could step up into them, and be protected from inclement weather while they ate. Many of these wagons incorporated an eating area with stools at one end and a tiny kitchen at the other. The kitchen also had a window or two for handing food to the customers who preferred to stay outside.¹⁰

In the early 1900s, with the development of the internal-combustion engine, self-powered "lunch wagons" or "dining cars" appeared (Figure 2). They bore a resemblance of lunch carts except that they had a bigger, lengthier interior form, and some were modeled after the railroad dining car.¹¹ Because they were oriented mostly to the working class population, they often operated late in the night, and became known as "the owls".¹² Lunch wagons offered coffee, doughnuts, sandwiches, beans and pie, and a typical bill averaged only

⁹ Helen Tangires, "American Lunch Wagons," Journal of American Culture 13 (1990): 91.

¹⁰ Langdon, 9.

¹¹ Joseph Manzo, "From Pushcart to Modular Restaurant: The Diner on the Landscape," Journal of American Culture 13 (1990): 14.

¹² "Coffee and in the Doggy Dog-Wagon," The Literary Digest (Feb 20, 1932), 43.

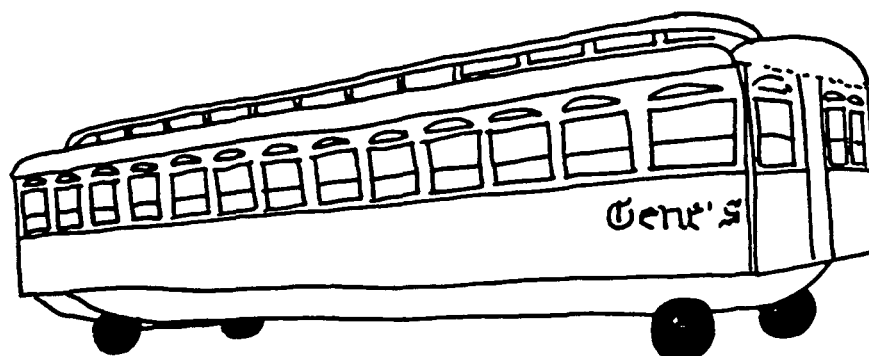


Figure 2 A dining car modeling a railroad dining car (adapted from The Literary Digest, 1932, 42)

thirty cents.

By about 1910, most lunch wagons or dining cars had ceased daily journeys through the streets. Instead, they settled on small plots of land in close proximity to railroad stations, ferryboat, or steamship landing piers, freight stations, factory districts, apartment house districts, or suburban traffic lines. At this time, they evolved into factory-made buildings known as "diners" (Figure 3). But experience continued to show that the most profitable locations were those where there was a twenty-four hour a day business.¹³

Diners bore some architectural resemblance to the lunch wagons, with a band of tiny ribbon windows and a monitor or barrel roof, but they served a larger menu, which included various meats, soups, sea foods, salads, pastries, fruits, and frozen desserts. The interiors were often finished with burnished nickel, quarter-sawed oak, black "marblelite," and colored tile. The kitchen was placed against a long

¹³ Manzo, 14, 19.

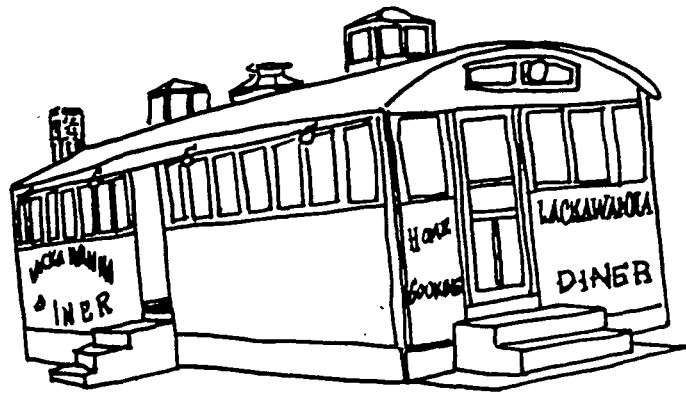


Figure 3 The Lackawanna diner, on Lackawanna Trail, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania (adapted from Baeder, 1982, 106)

wall with an eating counter parallel to it, open to the room. The operating equipment of the diner included stoves, warming pans, coffee urns, a refrigerator, storage bins, silverware and dishes. Customers, sitting on round metal stools, faced the cooking operation. The diner was ventilated by blower fans which expelled the fumes of food to the outside. Diners built from 1945-65 were bullet shaped with wrap-around windows which were mainly of steel construction (Figure 4). Over time, many diners developed a more permanent appearance; sometimes brick veneer was applied, big exterior windows replaced the tiny ribbon windows and higher ceilings were used on the interior. Diners were also incorporated into larger restaurants as dining rooms, and sometimes game rooms were added. With this vast expansion of space, waitressing service was made available and patrons expanded to include tourists and family groups.¹⁴

¹⁴ Manzo, 14, 19.

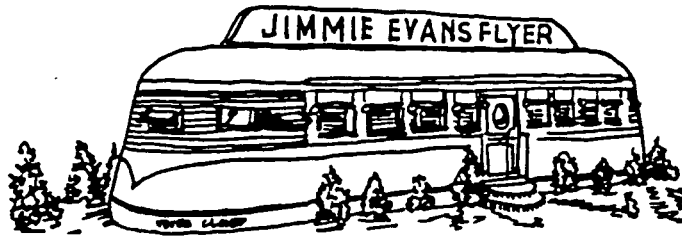


Figure 4 A bullet shaped diner (adapted from Baeder, 1982, 106)

Around 1910, at about the same time that the diner was established, soda fountains became a popular part of American life. In 1874, sweet cream syrup was replaced by ice cream. The new drink captivated the public, and a small number of drug stores began to operate soda fountains, serving beverages made of a mixture of soda water and ice cream. Soda fountains proliferated rapidly and were installed in many different places, from tobacco shops to fruit stores, anywhere that the business looked promising.¹⁵ By 1900, some operators began segregating the business of a soda fountain from drugstores by establishing them as independent institutions. There was no standardized building for a soda fountain, but most soda shops had their fountain units placed close enough to the windows so that the operation of making sodas could be seen from the street. A larger menu choice was served, including sandwiches, cakes, pies, sundaes and "orangeades" (a drink made with orange juice as an ingredient). The soda fountain was seen as a community center because fountains could

¹⁵ Langdon, 9.

be found wherever there were crowds. Patrons were primarily students and teenagers who claimed that the American soda fountain was the "drys" (non-alcohol drinker's) best friend. Linoleum, cork, or rubber were used widely for flooring; marble, "vitrolite" (a trade name for pigmented structural glass), or "sani-onyx" (a trade name for a sturdy, snow white glass) was used for serving counters; while walls could be painted or papered.¹⁶ By 1912, many soda fountains began to evolve into "luncheonettes," (a small restaurant where light lunches were sold), which offered a wider range of sandwiches, hot soups and salads.

By 1920, these luncheonettes and other counter-service establishments began to advertise themselves as "coffee-shops".¹⁷ Coffee-shops, synonymous with the word "cafe," were places where coffee and light meals, such as sandwiches, salads and soups, were served. No heavy cooking was done, and no alcoholic drinks were served. Like the diner, coffee shops (or cafes) took on a long and narrow interior configuration with a lengthy counter and a line of stools running from the front of the shop to the back (Figure 5). They were usually small restaurants and unpretentious. Customers faced the person behind the counter and the food preparation area. The word "cafe" implies a small eating place and evokes the image of neighborhood. Small groups of two or three friends were the most common aggregations in the cafe. With such small encounters, a sense

¹⁶ Joseph Oliver Dahl, Soda Fountain and Luncheonette Management (New York: Harper And Brothers, 1930), xiv, xvi, 25-26.

¹⁷ Langdon, 9.



Figure 5 Typical interior of a cafe

of privacy was created within the public place.

In the 1920s, with increased demand for fast, low-priced eating places, much of the inexpensive restaurant business was provided by yet another kind of institution--the "lunchroom". Lunchrooms were small and often cramped shops; they possessed neither the romance of the soda fountain nor the proletarian charm of the diner, yet lunchrooms achieved enormous success because they were economical.¹⁸ Interestingly, lunchroom is synonymous with luncheonette, meaning a small restaurant that specializes in serving light meals and food that were quickly prepared.

Lunchrooms occupied a sliver of ground-floor space in a building that contained other businesses at both the street level and on the floors above. The building's sidewalls were usually shared with adjoining buildings. Because of these conditions, the lunchroom had little potential for achieving a distinctive architectural identity; a

¹⁸ Langdon, 9.

window or sign was the only element to announce its presence, because the facade belonged to the entire building. Like the diner and the cafe, lunchroom interiors were long and narrow, with lengthly counters and a line of stools running from the front of the shop to the back. Customers faced the person behind the counter, and a food preparation area for short orders (such as sandwiches and hot dogs) hugged the sidewall. Heavier cooking (such as frying) was often done out of sight, in a kitchen at the rear. Where space was more generous, rows of tables occupied the center of the lunchroom (Figure 6). Noise and constant motion gave the customers little incentive to linger over lunch, and in fact, the management intended for there to be a quick turn-over. In the late 1920s, many of the better managed lunchrooms developed into chains, serving a single city, or spreading out to other cities, such as the chain of Childs lunchrooms in New York.¹⁹



Figure 6 Typical interior of a lunchroom with entry to back kitchen and a row of tables in the center

¹⁹ Langdon, 9-11.

In the late 1940s, after a decade of relative prosperity, the quest for bigger menus and more efficient and comfortable interiors, led diners to lose ground to low and moderately-priced restaurants. Unlike diners, cafes, and lunchrooms, restaurant owners considered human comfort an important attribute. Restaurant owners deviated from the counter arranged in a straight line, and began an arrangement of connected horse-shoes. Customers could more easily carry on conversations with one another at a U-shaped counter, and more importantly, the employee standing inside the "U" could serve more efficiently from a central position. By 1930, completely circular counters were tried as an experiment, but they required a building twice as wide as the typical urban storefront. Cafes established at this time (1930) used oval counters, which could be accommodated behind a single standard storefront (Figure 7). Through design, a restaurant could regulate their customers eating time. By relying on a noisy interior, less comfortable seating, and constant motion, restaurant design conveyed the message that customers should not linger.²⁰

In addition to a concern of comfort and efficiency, an interest in systematization encouraged the development of the cafeteria. Although many people think of cafeterias as a new food service type, they appeared as early as the 1890s, and were operated by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and other philanthropic organizations. By 1906, entrepreneurs saw that the cafeteria could be a profitable business. The key to a cafeteria was its large scale of

²⁰ Langdon, 11-15.

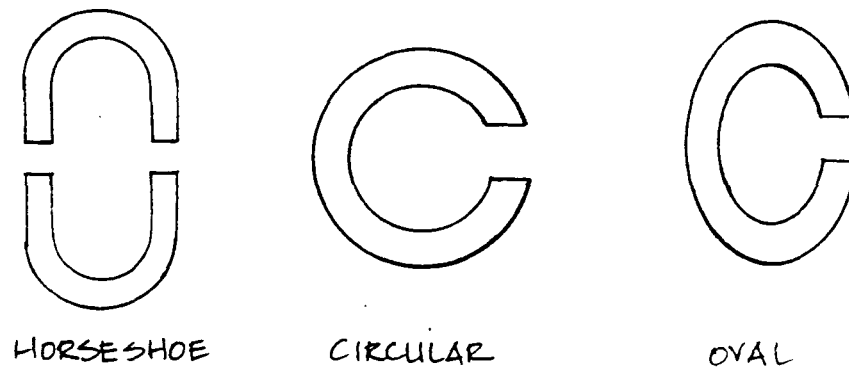


Figure 7 Plan view of alternative restaurant counters

operation. Cafeterias represented the food industry's first attempt at emulating the assembly line. A line of customers could put together their own meals, choosing among many choices, in a continuous moving operation. The owner did not need waitresses, tipping was eliminated, and the customers could see every food item before selecting it.

However, because of its ample kitchen size, large seating capacity, and a service counter which was often 75 feet long, cafeterias required much more space than the typical lunchroom or coffee shop. The cafeteria was best at providing a hot, big meal that was geared towards a wide public taste.²¹

The availability of mechanical and electrical power offered other imaginative possibilities for increasing efficiency. In 1921, an "Eat-As-You-Go Lunchroom," a mechanically operated cafeteria was invented (Figure 8). The idea was to emulate dining in a moving vehicle, with the goal of serving a large number of people in a few minutes. Tables and

²¹ Langdon, 13.

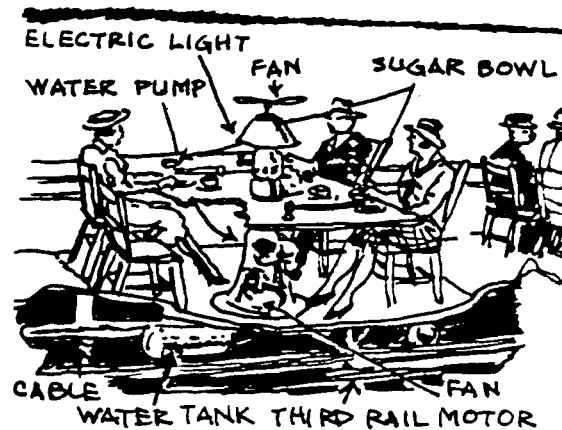


Figure 8 Invention of Lazarus Muntean of Highland Park, Michigan
(adapted from The Literary Digest, 1921, 21)

chairs were set on a platform that slowly moved around a room, and the platform was driven by electric motors. Dishes could be ordered when the patron first entered the restaurant, so that they would be ready when they arrived at the appropriate counter--meats, vegetables, pies or ice-cream. Only a small number of personnel was required to dispense coffee and tea and to keep the shelves of the serving-counter filled with food. The diners could sit at their tables and travel around the circuit until they finished their meal. Soiled dishes were transferred to belts which carried them to electric dishwashing machines in the kitchen. In the center of each table was a fountain from which ice-cold drinking water could be drawn. Each table was also to be fitted with a lamp and an electric motor operating a ventilating fan.²²

²² "An Eat-As-You-Go Lunchroom," The Literary Digest (Dec 24, 1921), 21-22.

The idea of self-service and efficiency also led to the development of automatic food service restaurants. In everyday American parlance before the mid-twentieth century, the word "vendor" no longer meant a *person* who sold food but "a machine that dispensed goods upon the deposit of a coin or coins".²³ The Autometer, imported from Germany in 1919, was a sideboard containing hundreds of semi-circular glass-covered compartments, each of which would deliver an article of food upon deposit of several nickels. Every food item could be seen clearly before it was purchased, and the vacant compartment was *automatically* refilled (Figure 9). Foods such as sandwiches, pastry, breads, macaroni and cheese, desserts and even coffee could be served through the Autometer. The lower-middle class, mainly urban clerical

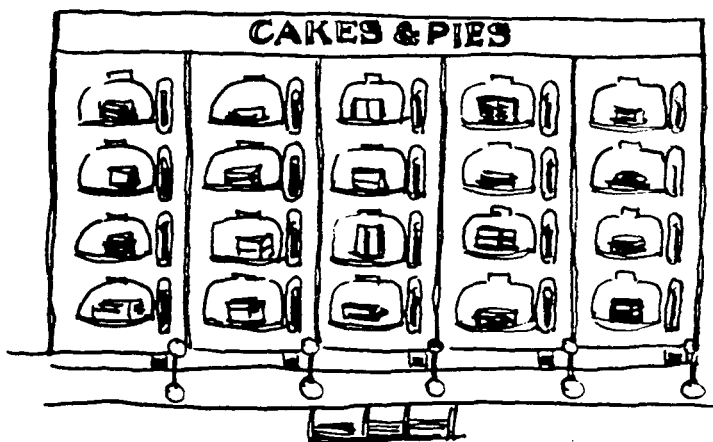


Figure 9 Autometer (adapted from The American Restaurant, 1924, 7: 34)

²³ Daniel J. Boorstin, The Americans--The Democratic Experience (New York: Random House, 1914), 442.

workers, made up the core of the Autometer's constituency.²⁴

Sanitation was a primary issue for all food institutions. Through the middle and late nineteenth century, scientists and public health experts acknowledged that disease was transmitted through germs. Conscientious restaurateurs began to consider new instruments of sanitation, such as electrically powered dishwashing machines. In the 1880s, pigmented structural glass (also known by the trade names of Vitrolite and Carrea) was used to achieve gleaming white interiors. Pigmented structural glass was a glasslike white material that was impervious to stains and scratches. By 1910, white marble was used on counters to give a spotless white look. "Sani-Onyx" table tops of sturdy, snow-white glass, and "Sanimetal" table legs, bases and stools, made of cast iron coated with white procelain enamel were also introduced. As the obsession with cleanliness grew, Vitrolite was substituted for white marble in counters.²⁵

In 1905, "Monel Metal," an alloy of copper and nickel, capable of retaining its silvery finish through years of use, was first produced. Monel Metal was used for the making of kitchen equipment, such as steam tables, intricate parts of mixing machines, coffee urns, refrigerators ice-cream cabinets, dish-washing machines, bread and meat slicers, and almost all kitchen equipment, movable or stationary. Monel metal was strong, non-corrodible, and had a highly polished surface, and therefore, it did not contaminate food. Maintaining monel

²⁴ "A Restaurant With Mechanical Brains," The American Restaurant 7 (May 1924): 34.

²⁵ Langdon, 19.

metal was easy, all that was required was soap and water cleaning.²⁶ About the mid 1900s, stainless steel arrived on the market, presenting a similar bright, shiny surface at a lower cost than monel.²⁷

By the 1920s, floors with exposed wood were no longer acceptable because they were not considered sanitary. Restaurant floors were tiled, covered with linoleum, or finished with a troweled-on substance resembling terrazzo.²⁸ Improved ventilation also aided sanitation. By the 1920s, restaurants were investing in exhaust fans, and in the late 1920s, air conditioning became available and was common place by the 1930s. By the 1950s, sanitation was a marketing ploy in which restaurants competed for sanitation "oscars" as their reward. The sanitation competition lasted for four weeks, and health inspections were made once every week. Restaurants with the highest score for four weeks in succession received the "oscar" and employees got a free steak or chicken dinner.²⁹

During the first decade of the ninetieth century, restaurants paid little attention to their exterior designs but invested rather heavily in flashing signs as a means of advertisement.³⁰ Two of the chief factors of attention getting and selling power, brightness and motion, were peculiar to electrical advertising. In addition to these two factors,

²⁶ "Manufacture and Use of Monel," The American Restaurant (Oct 1920), 118-120.

²⁷ Langdon, 19.

²⁸ Langdon, 19.

²⁹ B. L. Collins, "Competition Cleans Up," The American Restaurant (Oct 1955), 107.

³⁰ Langdon, 21.

position, size, originality, beauty, design, color, pictures, border, and maintenance were all important to an effective sign. The projecting horizontal sign, commonly called a "stick-out" was popular.³¹

Painted letter signs with exposed lamps set close together to form a continuous line of light on the border, or lamps studded in the face of painted letters were the first type of electrical sign. Raised opal glass letters through which concealed lamps could shine were also used. Some signs were formed of translucent glass set behind outline letters stamped in the metal body of the sign, while in others, the letters were frosted glass set on colored glass. Flat signs made of Carrea glass or Vitrolite were widely used on storefronts. Cast aluminum or stainless steel lettering, usually three-dimensional and free standing, could be used above or attached to a storefront. Between 1945 and 1965 elaborate animation through the use of colored neon was the most widely used sign system.³²

By the late 1920s, many restaurant owners enlarged their windows because plate glass was available and relatively inexpensive. By 1934, the use of clear plate glass had grown until most restaurants' facades were almost transparant from floor to ceiling. They were as visually open as some of the celebrated houses of the Modern Movement.³³

³¹ Charles C. Munroe, " When You Buy An Electric Sign," The American Restaurant (Dec 1924), 42-43.

³² Peter H. Phillips, "Sign Controls for Historic Signs," American Planning Associations (Nov 1988), 4.

³³ Langdon, 21.

To attract customers, storefronts and entrances were studied carefully. Storefronts could be divided into two major types: open and closed. The open front implied a visually open facade with metal frames and big glass panels that allowed customers to see the interior space with little obstructions. In the open front interior, space was framed like a showcase. A closed front was like a flat wall, although small windows might be used to cut through it. Often a closed curtain background was used to shut off the view of the store interior. This gave a sense of privacy to an establishment.³⁴

Entrances were also carefully thought out, resulting in a large enough entrance to allow elbow room for the customer. All, or part of the front, about two or three feet back from the building line, was recessed, allowing customers to have set out from the sidewalk's traffic to study the menu or displayed food (Figure 10).³⁵ Doors could be

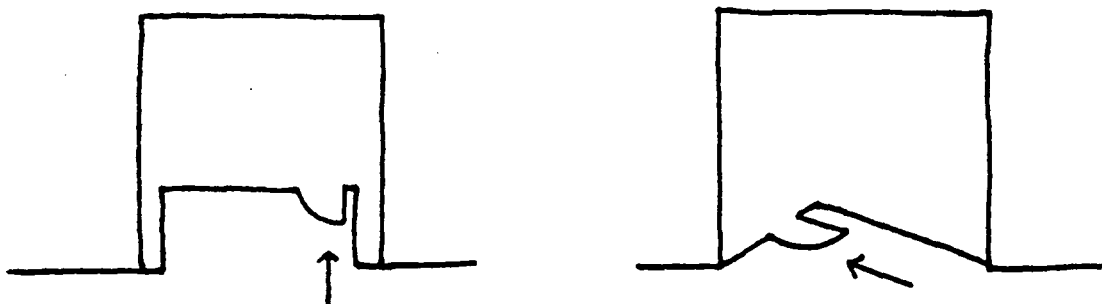


Figure 10 Door entrances with elbow room (adapted from Westwood, 1937, 18)

³⁴ Morris Ketchum, Shops and Store (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1948), 150-154.

³⁵ Bryan and Norman Westwood, Smaller Retail Shops (London: The Architectural Press, 1937), 17-20.

opened on the side of the building where storefront space was limited, or they could be placed in the center creating an air of symmetry.³⁶

Around 1920, restaurants began to establish a new image in the form of a single, free-standing building at the side of the road, to take advantage of the automobile industry. This was especially true in California where unusual building forms, vivid colors, and futuristic structural elements were used to distinguish restaurants from the surrounding landscape. Many roadside coffee shops relied on bold, futurist, car-oriented architectural forms which foreshadowed the expansion of coffee shops of the 1940s and 1950s. The demand for multiple driveways and large parking areas led restaurant buildings to stand far apart from their neighbors. In the 1930s, streamlining was adopted as an architectural form. The roots of streamlining as a design principle were to be found in the history of hydrodynamics and aerodynamics as applied to motor vehicles. The application of aerodynamic principles and organic design to architecture was an attempt to make structures appear up-to-date and scientifically refined.³⁷ Buildings were designed with rounded corners and detailed with flowing lines suggesting motion. Structural glass and procelain-enameled metal panels were used extensively on walls to make them look smooth and gleaming; stainless steel was used as futuristic accents and glass blocks were built into huge, glowing, translucent yet

³⁶ Ketchum, 148-169.

³⁷ Donald J. Bush, The Streamlined Decade (New York: George Braziller, 1975), 4-9, 128-131.

structural windows.³⁸ Geometric forms were relieved by organic lines, flat and curved walls dominated the interior, and glass blocks were used extensively in curved walls.³⁹ At the same time, amoeboid shaped canopies, beveled windows, and rectangular signs that represented a non-structural, abstract geometric style appeared (Figure 11). Buildings were constructed mainly of glass, steel and concrete. Large neon signs were used not only for lettering, or pictorially, but as an integrated architectural element to delineate form, and to serve as a spectacular landmark. In this mode, the building itself was conceived as a sign to attract customers, and to advertise itself effectively so that customers would first see the building from a distance.

In the 1950s, coffee shops with exaggerated roofs were introduced that boasted a flat tilting roof known as "anti-gravity

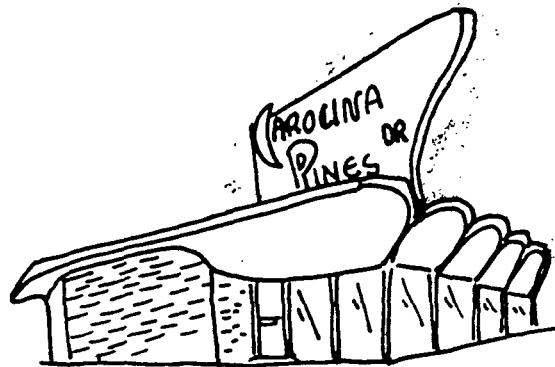


Figure 11 Carolina Pines, 1962, Los Angeles, California (adapted from Hess, 1985, 128)

³⁸ Chester H. Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile, American Roadside Architecture (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), 57.

³⁹ Peter Growland, "Coffee Shops," Arts and Architecture 2 (1983): 46.

architecture" (Figure 12). Besides using large neon signs, icons, such as Big Boy, were employed as a method of populist communication. (Big Boy represented the Ellias restaurant.) Hot colors, such as oranges, pinks, and reds were believed to stimulate the appetite and to encourage people to eat faster. Counter stools, with thickly padded, and often contoured backs, were set further apart than the diner stools, and they provided for both more physical and more psychological comfort. There was also an increased use of booths and straight or U-shaped counters. These coffee shops, or restaurants, were usually open twenty-four hours, and many were equipped with a drive-in service. They served a varied menu at reasonable prices with tourists and truck drivers as their major customers.⁴⁰

In 1949, the American Restaurant reported a new restaurant trend--an audiovoice movie-restaurant. The idea was to offer people

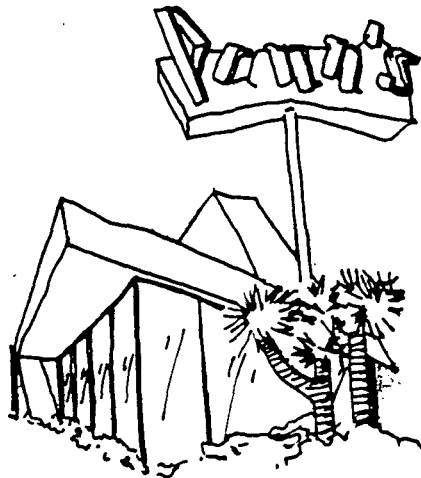


Figure 12 Pann's, 1956, Inglewood, California (adapted from Hess, 1985, 74)

⁴⁰ Langdon, 121.

who sat in their cars, a screen and sound projection. Entertainment could include a feature-length film, radio channels, or records. These movie-restaurants required a large vacant lot to handle cars. The system employed a screen, 7' by 8' in size, with speaker units mounted on posts beside each car. The speaker unit was equipped with a talk-back button where a customer could place an order in the kitchen, and food was served by waitresses carrying trays. But the movies and the music were not free; each speaker unit was equipped with an individual coin control device. These coin mechanisms were set to give ten minutes of operation for a dime, which amounted to sixty cents an hour. Sandwiches and soft drinks were the main menu items.⁴¹

Another drive-in innovation reported in a 1949 issue of The American Restaurant was known as "Motormat". The Motormat was an automatic, mechanical waiter, a food container, and a bus boy. It was made of stainless steel and equipped with a rack for laptrays. It operated in all kinds of weather, twenty-four hours a day, on tracks which radiated from a central kitchen. The customer only needed to drive his car between two concrete islands, remove the menu and pencil from the Motormat, and mark the quantity of desired items. Operators would retrieve the Motormat in the central kitchen and return the food order and change to the customer (Figure 13).

In the late 1960s, during a period of environmental awareness, tranquil colors and natural materials such as brick, wood and shingles

⁴¹ "Coming ... a New Restaurant Trend," The American Restaurant 31 (Feb 1949): 125-126.

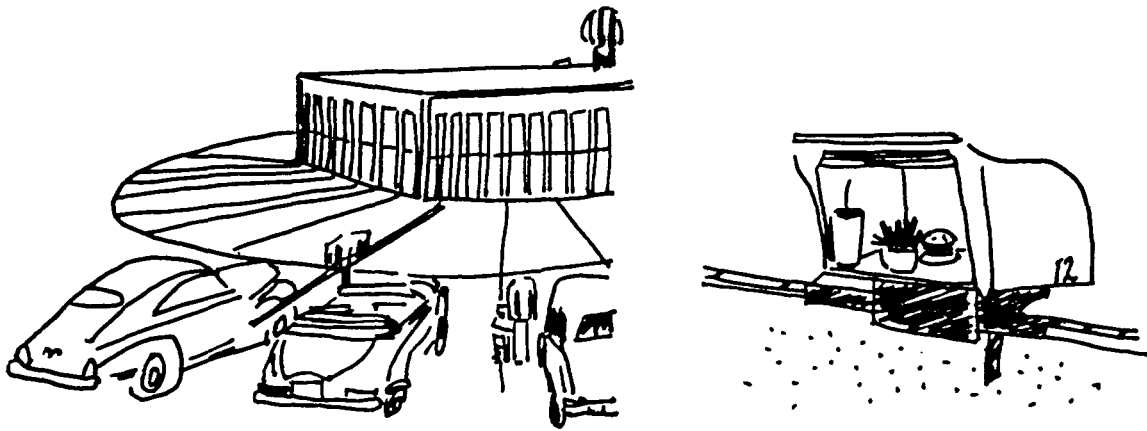


Figure 13 The Motormat Track, 1949, Los Angeles, California (adapted from The American Restaurant, 1949, 31: 48)

were used widely in restaurant design. Instead of grabbing a customer's attention, roadside architecture became refined and was scaled down into a more residential scale. It moved away from the bright, flashy colors, and large neon signs of the previous era. In keeping with natural themes, floors were laid with earth-toned carpeting, and colors became more subtle. The idea of this aesthetic shift was to generate a friendly, comfortable, and home-like interior because restaurant owners believed that residential-like design would earn them more money.

By the early 1970s, as land became scarce and more expensive, restaurants and coffee shops returned to shared buildings (buildings sharing sidewalls). Because of sign ordinances and a shift of public's sensibilities, large graphic designs were no longer as important as they were in the 1950s, and sign sizes were reduced. Neon signs, which were expensive to operate and difficult to maintain, were replaced by painted

wall signs. The public entrance was stimulating in appearance only where it was an integral part of the restaurant's architectural theme.

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, upscale restaurant themes became important and were sometimes carried to extremes. These included war themes, with eating places that bore names like the "91st Bomb Group;" automobile themes with waitresses serving beer from old transparent gasoline pumps; futuristic themes where video games became the focal point; and historic themes where pictures of former actors, actresses and signers were displayed. Later, it became a challenge to find thematic subject matter that had not already been thoroughly exploited. Restaurant themes that had the most longevity were those that complemented the food that was served. Those restaurants that intended to attract young adults created nostalgic atmospheres such as a neighborhood soda shop or a neighborhood bar-and-grill. Design with a residential character maintained a considerably broader appeal among customers. In fact, according to Langdon, a residential environment has always had an appreciative market among restaurant owners.⁴² In the 1980s, with a growing consumer interest in health food, food preparation was once again put on public view. The interest in restaurant themes continued, accompanied by a concern of contextualism, that is, paying attention to the character of the area in which the restaurant was placed.

In summary, each evolving restaurant type had its own clientele, food service, architectural expression, and marketing strategy.

⁴² Langdon, 265.

Aesthetics in exterior and interior architecture were not important in the low priced restaurants in the 1920s, but during the 1930s, an emphasis on appearance increased. Besides aesthetics, human comfort (or the lack of it) was also used by the restaurant industry as a strategy of length of stay by customers. Increasingly, aesthetics and design have become more important. The American restaurant industry seems to have come full circle; push-car vendors appear again on city streets and nostalgia for earlier times have led some high-style restaurants to inappropriately call themselves as a cafe. Such as Cafe Spiaggia located in Chicago's Gold Coast, rather than serving plain, wholesome food along with unpretentious interior, expensive food and rich interior project an image of a high-style restaurant.⁴³ Another example is an haute cuisine Mexican restaurant calling itself as Cafe Marimba. Inside this restaurant, alcoholic drinks are served, along with a dance floor for customers to dance.⁴⁴ These are not the only two high-style restaurants calling themselves as cafes, but there are a lot more restaurants that are mistaken by the general public as cafes.

This historical research has provided me with a better understanding of the restaurant business, that would help me to identify them more accurately in the future.

⁴³ Nova J. Rubinstein, "Italian Slant," Interiors (May 1985), 270-271.

⁴⁴ Andrea Truppin, "Illusionary Magic," Interiors (April 85), 120-121.

CHAPTER IV

THE GROVE CAFE

This chapter contains the history and physical description of the Grove cafe, (including its location, design description of its interior and exterior), as well as an analysis of its interior and exterior design expression and its cultural identity.

History

The present day Grove Cafe opened in 1927 as the Star, a twenty-four hour cafe that offered beverages and a limited menu of steaks, chicken and chops as its "meal-of-the-day". In 1962, new owners renamed it as the Grove Cafe. Like its predecessor, the Grove opened twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It offered a wider range of menu choices than the Star and advertised, "Air conditioned for your comfort" as a means to attract customers. In 1972, the Grove was purchased by the present owner, Jim Stone. He retained the cafe's name but reduced the cafe's hours of operation from 5:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. on weekdays, and from 5:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. on Saturdays. Currently, breakfast and lunch are the only meals offered, with breakfast as its specialty.

Physical Description

The Grove Cafe is located on the south side of the Main Street, in the 100 block of downtown Ames, Iowa (Figure 14). There is a front entrance on the Main Street and a back entrance from the parking lot:

both entrances are used by customers. It shares sidewalls with adjoining buildings. Meter parking is available along the street, and there is free parking at the rear. Because of its strategic location in the business district, public transportation is two blocks away from the cafe.

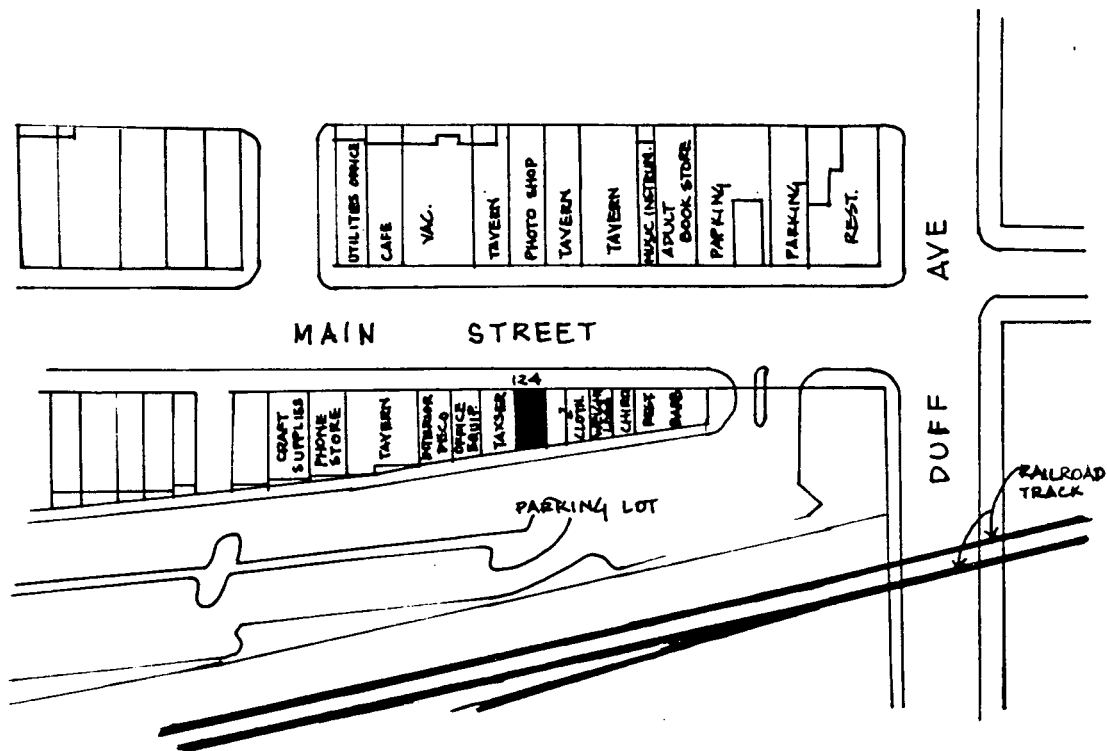


Figure 14 Location of the Grove cafe

The cafe has a brick facade which is neutral in color. There are two signs for advertisement. One sign is located on the upper part of the building near the cornice line, and the other is located just above the doorline beside the entrance (Figure 15). The upper sign extends beyond the facade at a ninety-degree angle. It is plain and simple with a white background and brown graphics. One end of the sign is rounded with approximately two feet in height by three feet in width. An arrow motif reinforces the rounded end by curving itself into an arc, pointing back toward the cafe entrance. This sign has a different treatment on each of its sides. One side is painted white with "The Grove Cafe" executed in Franklin Gothic outlined in brown. On the other side, "The Grove Cafe" is painted in slanted Kaufmann, alongside an icon of a chef's head with a scarf and hat. In order to relate itself to the other side of the sign, the chef is painted in white and outlined in brown. The sign is maintained in good condition.

The second sign is painted on a plywood wall panel which also contains two rectangular windows. The window panel is painted in brown with graphics in white (Figure 16). "124" is painted on the left side and the word "Main" is painted on the right side with graphic in the middle. The graphic contains a logo with a chef holding a pot that sits on a tray, with the cafe's name painted beside it.

A third sign, in neon, was recently placed inside the rectangular windows, but it is too small to gain much attention (Figure 17). The neon is bent in script, saying "breakfast" (in white) and "lunch" (in yellow) with a cup (in white). The cup shows steam coming out of it,



Figure 15 The two signs used on the front facade

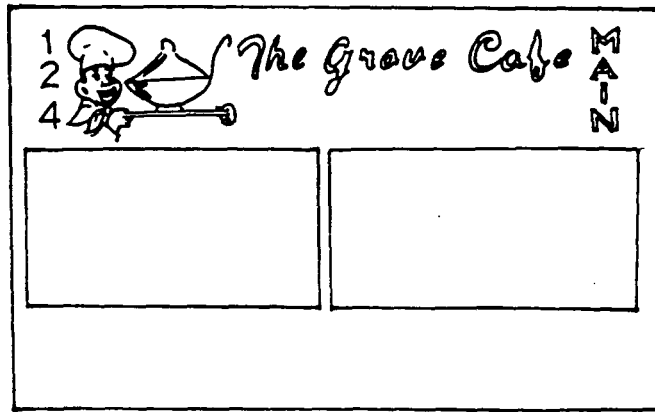


Figure 16 Painted sign above windows

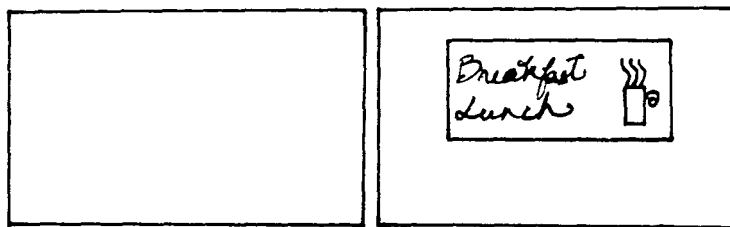


Figure 17 Neon sign placed against the window

implying hot coffee. It is framed in green neon. Although three signs are used to communicate the presence of the cafe, they are, for the most part, rather understated because of lack of color contrast and small sizes compared to the building as a whole.

The rear facade is constructed of concrete blocks rather than bricks. In the late 1970s, when the downtown merchants painted the backs of their buildings with murals, the Grove received a mural treatment as well. Painted on a white background is a naturalistic scene with trees standing firmly on nature's earth. The height of the trees is unknown because only a variation of sizes of tree trunks can be seen. A painted sign is found at the lower right hand corner with "The Grove

Cafe" in brown script (Figure 18). Although it identifies the back entrance, it does so in a very subdued fashion due to its natural colors, rear location, and fading.

Unlike a roadside cafe where a wall of glass or large windows are used extensively on the exterior to display the interior, the Grove cafe takes on a secluded character, due to the understated design of its exterior and interior. This element of seclusion is reinforced with the use of interior blinds for the two facade windows. In effect, the blinds seal the building from the outside world.

Like other cafes that were founded in the 1920s, the interior of the Grove is long and narrow; the short-order kitchen is in full view against the west wall, corresponding to a lengthy counter with a line of stools from the front of the shop to the back. (There is one break in the middle of the counter for more efficient serving and waitressing.) Customers face the food preparation area. The owners, Mr. and Mrs. Stone, serve as waiters. The cafe can seat approximately thirty-eight people. There are eight stools along the serving counter, six booths, and



Figure 18 Painted mural at the back of the facade

one free-standing circular table with chairs (Figure 19).

Although there is another kitchen at the back of the building, most of the cooking is executed in front of the customers. Food preparation and baking are the only activities done in the back kitchen. According to the owner, people like to watch the cooking, so the open kitchen serves as the main activity area and as well as entertainment. The Grove's interior color scheme is pale yellow and green with the use of brown as an accent. According to the owner, green tones are believed to increase one's appetite. The upper walls are painted in yellow and the lower wall treatment has 26 inches high wood paneling and green carpet on the floor (Figure 20).

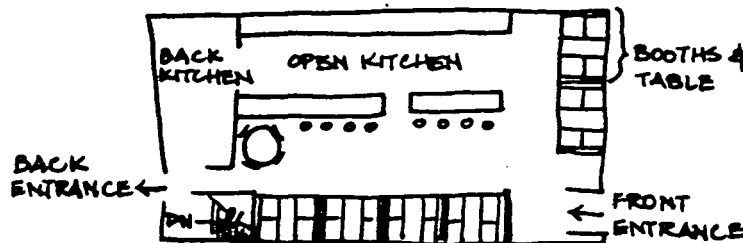


Figure 19 Existing Grove's plan

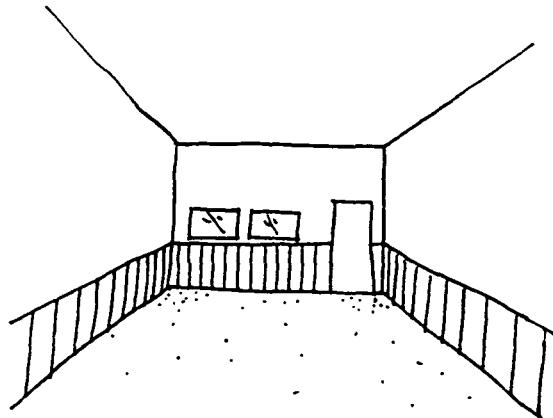


Figure 20 Walls treated with wood panelings

Like the exterior architecture, signage, and interior treatment, design does not play an important role in the graphic identity associated with tableware, appointments, or menu design. Cups, saucers, plates and heavy-duty cafe ware are all in plain white. There is a two-sided one page menu printed on yellow paper. On one side is a handwritten menu and the other side is blank with no graphics or words written on. To ensure its longevity, a transparent sheet of plastic encases both sides of the menu. Small plain white napkins with no graphic identity are available from napkin dispensers on each table and the counter.

Design Expression

The exterior

The Grove's building has a flat roof, contradicting the belief that flat roofs belongs to the countries of the sunny south (where a roof is never weighted down by snowfall). According to Thiis-Evensen, the flat roof illustrates the most neutral articulation; it is basically unaffected by the environment and, in principle, without expression.

The front facade or the "public space" of a building (as Robert Venturi has put it) is clad with multi-colored bricks of red, brown, dark green, and tan. Although the rectangular shape of the bricks is familiar, the use of multi-colors makes the facade somewhat unique in its downtown setting among red brick storefronts. The facade attempts to make itself look special and different from its neighboring buildings that are unified by one color.

Although the Grove Cafe has a brick facade, a feeling of massiveness or heaviness is not expressed due to the small size of the bricks and the one-story building height. In fact, the facade seems *light* and *friendlier* than what one would expect of a brick building. Nor does the brick make the facade appear thick, because the bricks are not deep, they are cladding materials over a wood frame building (rather than a masonry building). The bricks have little texture and express a smooth surface. The result gives an impression of a very *neutralized* facade. The bricks are layed horizontally, repeating the "rectangular" form of the Grove and increasing the compact, horizontal appearance of the facade (Figure 21).

The facade of the cafe can be divided into three parts: a top body with a protruding sign, a middle body containing two horizontal windows and a flat sign above them, and a base (Figure 22). The middle body is the largest division, drawing the wall's centerline downward so that the top and lower section become narrow in view. But instead of dominating the facade, the middle body fades in with the top and base divisions because it is flush and its coloring (a field of

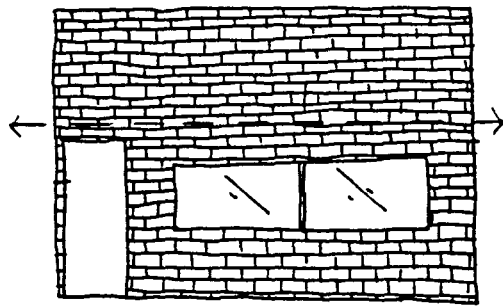


Figure 21 Flush, smooth surface of the front facade

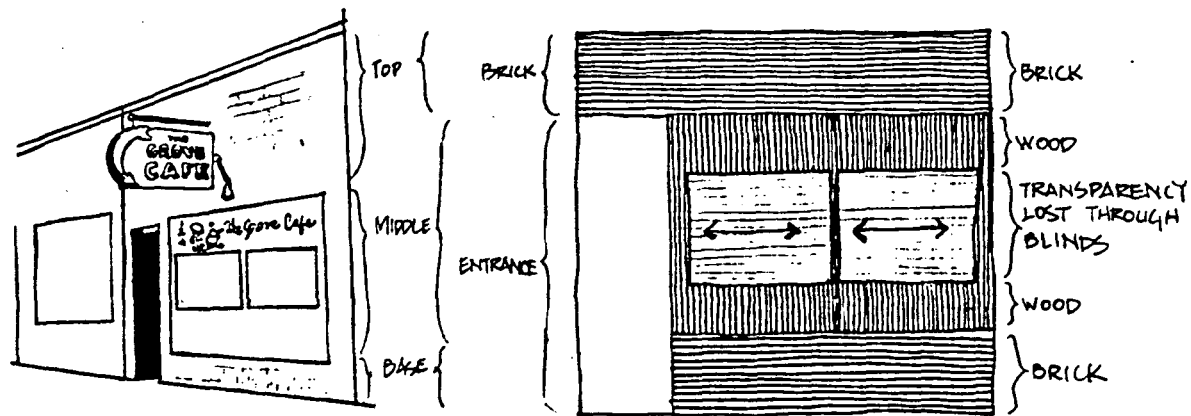


Figure 22 The divisions of the front facade

brown) corresponds with the brick of the surrounding sections. Although there is a change of materials in the middle section, there is not much tension and conflict between the wood and brick. It is simply because their colors are compatible with one another and both are natural materials. The two rectangular windows lose their ability to serve as a transparent body because of the use of interior blinds where they are unable to allow information to transmit in and out freely. In other words, the window as a symbol of what is inside is blocked. The rectangular windows also convey a sideways motion, as if the people inside are of no concern to the outside; people seem to pass in front of us, and past us.

When analyzing the two exterior signs of the Grove cafe and the newly placed neon sign, one finds that there is *tension* and *conflict* between them. Neon is *bright*, *eye-catching*, and *sophisticated*; the painted signs seem dated and bland by contrast. Additionally, the logo

is somewhat misleading; the sign with a chef holding a big pot on a tray may be misinterpreted to mean that the food is fancier than it really is, and that the cafe is open at night, as well as in the daytime. The small neon sign conveys a better interpretation of the cafe--that it serves *breakfast, lunch* and a hot cup of *coffee*.

The rear elevation assumes its own identity because of the use of concrete blocks as a construction material. Unlike the front, the rear takes on a massive appearance because of the larger size blocks. It looks *heavy* and *thick*, and it conveys a certain *sturdiness*.

The rear facade mural takes on an abstracted natural theme, abstract in the sense that the colors are false. Instead of using green for the leaves, blue for the sky, green for the grass, everything is painted in only two colors--white and brown. The natural theme is strongest on the rear facade rather than at the front, and is transmitted abstractly into the interior, stopping at the front. Only the wood panel on the front evokes the image of a natural material and provides any continuity between front, middle, and back (Figure 23).

In summary, the two exterior signs and the front facade fail to convey the message that housed inside the rectangular form is a cafe. The signs and facade treatment seem weak in evoking a cafe character, but the owners are confident in that serving "good food" substitutes for an eye-catching facade design. On the whole, the facade is a *flat wall* that gives us no clues about the inside-outside relationship.

The entrance that leads one into the cafe hugs one corner of the building, and the door is recessed into a niche. It expresses safety

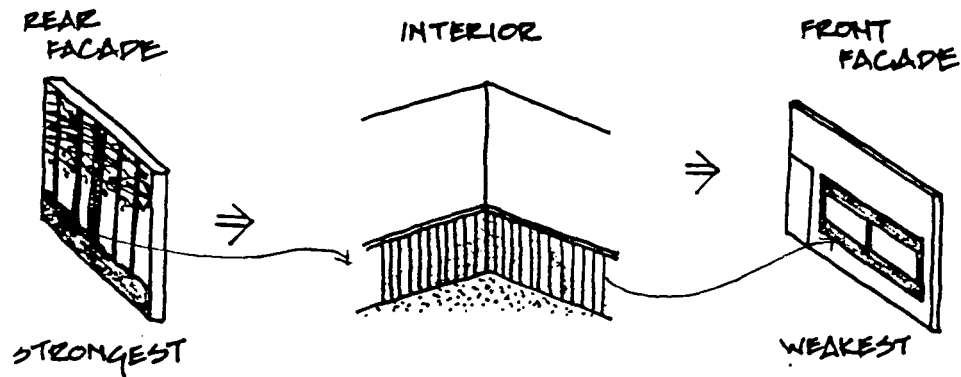


Figure 23 The recession of a natural theme from strongest to weakest-rear to front facade

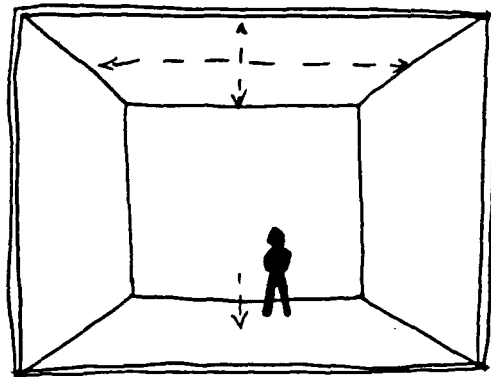
because it protects patrons from everchanging weather. The recessed door leads customers from one place into another place, its expression as an entry is that of a short tunnel where reality is left behind. Perceptually, one enters an idealistic world where one is sheltered from the harshness not only from the weather, but life. In a welcoming gesture (and one required by code), the door swings out, bringing the interior space out *towards* us.

The interior

The interior of the Grove cafe is a rectangular form with four flat walls, a flat ceiling, and a flat floor. The original ceiling has been lowered by a metal frame with acoustical tiles, thus reducing the overhead space. Functionalism plays an important role in the ceiling because the tiles help to control and absorb sound. While creating a

contrast between the ceiling and walls, the paneled walls seem to contract and the ceiling zone appears to expand (Figure 24).

The floor is connected to the surrounding walls in such a way that the volume is totally enclosed and cut off from the surrounding wall planes. This is a product of modernism in which floors without any apparent transition merges with the walls in the space (Figure 25). The eating area is carpeted, but the floor of the open kitchen and the back



THE FLAT ROOF IS NEUTRAL

Figure 24 The expression of a flat roof

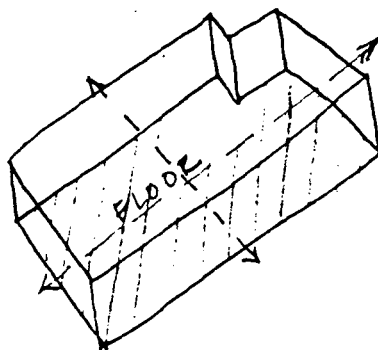


Figure 25 The expression of the floor

kitchen are sheets of vinyl. Both flooring materials are shades of green, the vinyl floor is also functional for the work area because it is easily cleaned and durable. The carpet is softer for the customers' feet. Perceptually, both materials are attached to the ground. They resemble nature in their green color and because they convey the feeling of a solid footing. The carpet is "as green as grass" which serves as a metaphor for a natural phenomenon. The function of a carpet (or grass) is to separate or cover the floor (earth) underneath, and as such it softens and protects us from the cold hard ground.⁴⁵ The carpet is a detached floor because it hides dirt and soil, (grass hides sand and soil). Carpets also harbor germs, (where grass is the habitat for insects), and both require maintenance. While the vinyl floor (or earth) is firm and solid, it gives us a sense of security. Light cannot penetrate the solid ground; it is dark and cold, usually associated with death, because it is a place for the burial of the dead.⁴⁶ But both of them are detached floors because they cover another floor underneath, protecting either those who walk on it or the floor beneath it.

In analyzing the floor plan, there is a clear division between the serving and working areas, with the serving area dominating the space in about a three-quarters proportion (Figure 26). When focusing on just the serving area alone, there is no evidence of a directional floor pattern (Figure 27). Although the owner maintains both the carpet and tiles, they show signs of aging, because the materials were inexpensive and

⁴⁵ Thiis-Evensen, 59.

⁴⁶ Thiis-Evensen, 79.

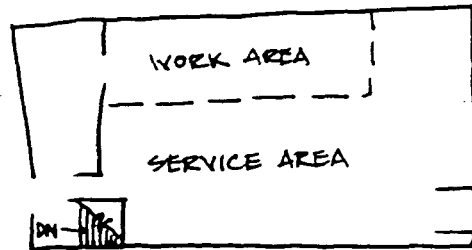


Figure 26 The division between service and work areas

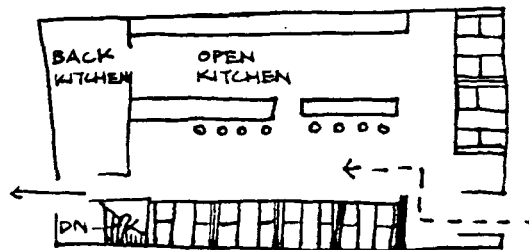


Figure 27 Unidirectional floor pattern

because the colors were dull.

Three-quarters of the height of the wall with wood paneling evokes a sense of intimacy, an impression which is reinforced by booth seating next to the wall. The use of wood paneling not only helps in breaking up an uninteresting rectangular form but it also acts as a base, a ground for the wall (as a tree rising from a grassy plain). The paneling adds *warmth* to the space by breaking up a cold hard wall.

The wall of the cooking area is used solely for kitchen cabinets. Its pale yellow color does not serve as a contrast between itself and the wood paneling, but rather as a background color for the *shiny*,

silverness of the open kitchen. On this wall, the silver sheen of the kitchen cabinets and utensils become the focal point.

There are two aesthetic themes expressed in the interior materials: metallic and natural. Although both are the product of manufacturing processes, the metallic speaks strongly of the modern world (especially of the historic technological and the sanitation restaurant trends), while the natural softens and downplays the commercial aspects of the cafe.

Stainless steel kitchenware and equipment, widely used in cafes during the late twenties, was seen as an up-to-date sophisticated material that was durable and easy to maintain. Although the kitchen equipment found in the Grove cafe is not streamlined, in strict design terms, it evokes the modern era because of the material. Equipment made of stainless steel is *powerful* because it is *long lasting* and *functional*.

While the kitchen equipment has held up well in daily usage, the stools show signs of aging. The stool's legs are also made of metal, but the finish has begun to fail (Figure 28). Because of daily abrasion and dirt, the metal edges on the seats no longer look shiny, but they retain the aesthetic of the stream-lined style. The seats are smooth and round with legs that are thin and sleek. Grooved lines encompass the metal edges of the seats, emphasizing their roundness and smoothness.

The carpet inside the Grove is green. It has a low cut pile enabling its tactile quality to be easily seen. The carpet identifies with the growth of grass; except the green vinyl floor is hard and cold, more

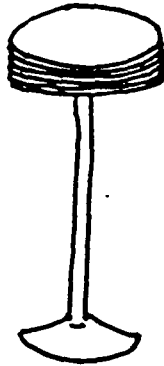


Figure 28 Stool used in the Grove

analogous with the growth of moss on stones. Not only their forms relate well with their colors but their colors have weight too. The green carpet is dull in color, projecting a sense of heaviness which in turn, gives us a sense of security. The wood paneling is warm, a natural alive material. The pale yellow walls are cool, helping to expand space and to project our reactions to light and sun calmly. The white acoustical tiles help expand space and bring in the natural lightness of sky from the exterior into the interior. The mixture of color hues and their meanings help bring out the natural theme from the exterior into the interior.

Instead of conflicting with one another, these two material aesthetic themes--the natural and the metallic--seem to blend well with each other; neither tries to overwhelm the other, creating in total a very "neutral" theme. The aesthetics compliment each other because of their colors, (nature's colors embrace the harshness of the steel), and their textures, (both the wood paneling and the kitchen equipment are

smooth). The hard surfaces of the kitchen equipment reflects sound while carpeting helps absorb it.

In summary, the Grove Cafe is a product of functionalism, (a familiar box without ornamentation), yet it has attempted to break loose from its functional state by incorporating a man-made natural theme into its rigid form. Unfortunately, it accomplished little. The facade did not help to convey the cafe's character but rather hinders it, and that put the cafe into a very "neutral" theme.

Cultural Analysis

In this analysis, the Grove is viewed as a cultural scene, (where a basic cultural concept can be generated because it is a local cafe frequented by local patrons), involving both the owners, their employees, and the customers. Both the owners (husband and wife) work in the cafe. On weekdays, they employ a third person, and on Saturdays, the owners' son and daughter also work in the cafe.

In a two hour interview, the owners gave me their impressions of the customers' occupations and education. Mr. Stone told me that the ages of his customers vary, but generally, they can be divided into two categories. The first customer group ranges in age from their early fifties to the mid-sixties, and the second category encompasses a mid-twenties to a mid-thirties group. Men from the 50-65 age group are primarily the working class and retired persons who come early in the morning (from 5:00 a.m. till 11:00 a.m.) to have breakfast. White-collar, working class, and young professionals come in to have lunch (from

11:00 a.m. till 2:00 p.m.). The cafe is mostly visited by male patrons, with female customers comprising about 10% only. White-collar comprises about 25% and the rest being the working class patrons. According to the Stone's impressions, most of the white-collar workers have obtained a college degree, while some of the blue-collar workers are pursuing technical skills in a college environment. Customers in the second category have high school diploma, but customers from the first category may not. Customers in the 50-65 age category know each other well, but customers from the second category do not, because of the variation in their age, occupation and education. Both the owners felt that customers from both gender categories know them. Some customers are close friends and additionally the owners call several of their customers by their first names. Casual conversation (such as the weather or news) are generally conducted between the owners and customers, but family issues are discussed with some closer patrons.

In order to get a sense of the cultural scene, I visited the Grove and observed at several times, spending about eight hours totally observing and interviewing. Non-verbal or body language is commonly seen between the owners and their customers, including shaking hands, patting each other on the shoulder, and sometimes hugging each other close and tight. All observations and interviews are recorded in writings and taped.

According to Mr. Stone, the kind of casual conversation shared by the customers can be divided into five types. Customers that come in between five to six in the morning have their conversation based on the

world news, while those who come in between six to seven in the morning have conversations that are based on local Ames news. Customers from seven to eight in the morning discuss local and state news; those from between eight to eleven in the morning discuss news about their own families and friends. From eleven in the morning to two in the afternoon, customers conduct a variety of conversation topics, ranging from news of their own families to business concerns.

During the weekdays, patrons are mostly working class, retired persons, and professionals. On the weekends, customers are composed of small family groupings and retired persons. To strengthen my impressions of the Grove's cultural meaning, I randomly selected three customers to serve as informants. I visited them on a Saturday morning, from 8:00 till 10:00 a.m. During these three interviews, questions were asked about their reasons for visiting the Grove, their occupation, and their relationship with the owners. Although the informants were the same gender (male), they were differed from each other in age, educational level, and occupation.

The first informant, in the 60-70 age group, is a retired person. His level of education is about sixth grade. As a frequent customer, he becomes a close friend of the owners, (hugging and back-patting are seen between him and Mr. Stone). The informant never visits the Grove alone, because he always meets his other retired friends to have breakfast together. The second informant, aged 20-30, works as a professional landscape architect in Des Moines. He has a college degree at Iowa State University. He is a weekend customer. The casual

conversation with the owners involved only the news and simple jokes. The third informant, in the 40-50 age group, has a high-school diploma and is a business person in downtown Ames. Although he is also a frequent customer of the Grove, his relations with the owners are based on business concerns. Their conversation includes a greeting and an update of business news (such as whether their respective businesses have been profitable that day or not), but further conversation is limited. He sees the cafe as a place to eat alone or with a client, and as a place that provides good food to satisfy his appetite.

The owner referred his cafe as "the greasy spoon". As an international student, this term was unfamiliar to me, and I asked him to explain it. To me, the term is nothing but complimentary. He explained that "greasy spoon" was a label imposed on small cafes like the Grove. He was proud of being characterized his cafe in this manner because he believed such comment would help to promote his business. Out of curiosity, people would dine at the Grove to find out if it was truly notorious or not. Several slang dictionaries lend additional insight into the cultural meanings of the term "greasy spoon". According to The Dictionary of Contemporary Slang, greasy spoon means "a cheap cafe or restaurant; for the state of its cutlery and the texture of its product". In A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English, greasy spoon means "any small, dirty restaurant". In addition to Mr. Stone's own definition, I asked the three informants to define greasy spoon. The first informant told me that it meant dirty and greasy. He stated that every time when he had a meal at the Grove, his wife would be able to tell

where he had been simply by smelling his clothes. This informant defined greasy as possessing, not only a textural quality, but an olfactory one as well, which came close to the dictionary definition as "dirty and textured". My second informant defined "greasy spoon" literally, stating that it was a historical term referring to a place where spoons were not washed properly. The third informant told me that "greasy spoon" meant dirty, but he defended the cafe anyway, stating that the cafe was not really dirty and that it offered good food. Furthermore, he thought that the term referred to a restaurant that was owned as a private, family business. Although the informants came up with their own interpretations, they all agreed that the term "greasy spoon" meant *dirty*. However, none of them agreed that the Grove was truly dirty, but rather it was a place that offered good plain food.

When I asked the informants why they frequented the Grove, they stated that they came mainly for the good food. From an etic point of view (statements that are real, meaningful or appropriate by informant), good food may be the main attraction of the Grove, but the term "greasy spoon" led me to explore the emic aspect as well (description derived from the cultural language as heard by the observer).

Referring back to my first informant, (who is a retired person and a close friend of the owners), he told me that the Grove served as an ideal place for him to meet friends simply because of the non-commercial (homelike) atmosphere and the right to choose his favorite seating in the cafe. Instead of sitting at the counter, he and his friends

prefer booths next to the windows which allow them more privacy. Such booths are closer to the open kitchen but isolated from others which allow them to have a world of their own. Being close to the kitchen permits them to chat frequently with the owners, and the isolation allows an invisible personalization of the space (Figure 29).

I was told by my second informant that he preferred sitting on stool rather than in a booth, placing him in a position that was closest to the open kitchen. Since he is a bachelor and does not cook much, he enjoys the Grove's food and loves being away from his work with the opportunity to tell jokes in the Grove. Telling jokes and teasing the owners offer the informant relief from work. During my observation, Mrs. Stone was often a victim of his teasing, but she did not seem to take it personally. In fact, joking seemed to take her mind from the work as well.

In addition to good food and a non-commercial atmosphere, the third informant enjoys having his own observations. It includes eavesdropping and discussing business matters with the owners, which allow

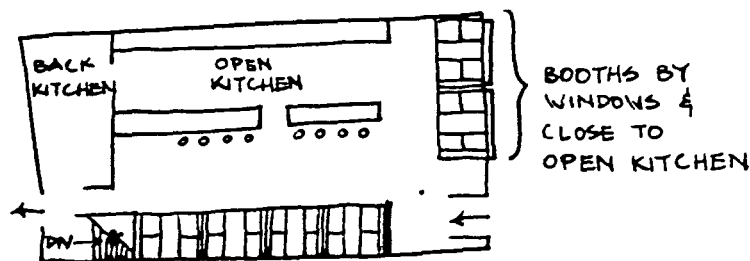


Figure 29 The two favorable booths

him to know about other businesses on the Main Street.

Another frequent patron is a former mayor who is attracted to the Grove because of the variety of people he encounters there. According to the owners, he comes primarily from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m. on weekdays, when retired persons and a few family groups are present. He does not have a favorite seat in the Grove, but rather, he switches location frequently in order to get acquainted with more people. When he was the mayor, he used the Grove as an informal office to establish a time where people could meet with him about their problems. Now that he is no longer the mayor, he sometimes helps the owners on Friday to set up tables for "Fish Day" (a day for the remembrance of the suffering of Jesus Christ), because he is one of the Fathers for the local Episcopal church.

Privacy applies to the working class patrons as well, who are the first group to come into the Grove. According to Mr. Stone, they too, choose their favorite seats, and by 7:00 a.m., when most have left for their work, the retired persons come in and take their seats. There is a rotation between the two groups. It is possible for the owners and customers to get better acquainted when business is not as heavy in the early part of the day. During my observation, the owners were familiar with their customers' orders since they knew what they would eat and how to prepare their food. Patrons were also allowed to pick and choose a combination of items not on the menu. Between the two groups, the owners feel closer to their working class patrons since they

relate to each other as hard workers (physical strength is deeply involved in restaurant work).

For a better understanding of their relationships, I also observed on Friday morning from 5:30 to 6:15 a.m. During this time frame, I chose four informants who were all regular patrons. Same as last time, they were all males, (no female customers were seen during my time of observation), with their ages ranging between mid forties to late fifties. When asked why they frequented the Grove, the first and second informants told me that it was because of good food and service, while the third and fourth informants named not only the good food, but also what they termed "pleasurable company," which meant their friends and the owners. Interestingly, all four of my informants believe that the Grove is a cafe for working men, primarily because of the informal atmosphere, service, and design (nothing fancy). The second informant told me that the Grove was the only restaurant to be opened at five in the morning on Main Street, which means that this would limit certain competition from its neighboring restaurants. My third informant said that even after a hard day work with dirty clothes on, he would still feel comfortable having lunch at the Grove without embarrassment. They find themselves relaxed in the Grove because of informality. In fact, the second informant described the cafe as his second home.

What they have said was true to them--good food, good service and an informal atmosphere--and in their perspective, these may be the elements that keep them going back to the cafe (etic). But during my observation, the owners were open in their conservation and did not

shy away from discussing their family affairs in front of their patrons, and, conversely, the patrons were free to offer advice to the owners. Although all four of the latter informants knew the term "greasy spoon," they did not prefer using it to describe the Grove, because it means dirty to them, and they all agree that the Grove is not greasy and dirty. Three of the informants had no special name for the Grove, but the fourth informant referred to it as the "usual place" when speaking to his friends.

The owner was perceived by my informants as a good cook, and also, as a friend. They stated that Mr. Stone is generous in his attitudes toward others and that he is willing to help his customers when needed. For instance, if someone came into the cafe for breakfast but had no money, Mr. Stone would ask him to work in the back kitchen to "pay" for his meal.

Mr. Stone is perceived as a good business person, in part, because he chats with his customers, tells jokes, circulates in the cafe, and constantly talks with his customers whenever he is free from the kitchen. Mrs. Stone acts as an important helper of Mr. Stone; she tries to remember every aspect of their customers--their face and name, the type of food they prefer, and how they like it prepared. Good food, warm service, an informal atmosphere, and the active roles played by the owners add up to the Grove's success.

After reviewing my impressions of the Grove as a cultural scene, I find that the Grove establishes a homelike and friendly atmosphere. Being able to participate in the owners' family affairs enables the

customers to feel at home and they are treated with respect by the owners. Conversation is also somewhat familiar, in addition to the opportunity to discuss local and state news, political and social views can be discussed freely in the Grove. This freedom of speech is often expressed personally, because the owners are good listeners, as well as the other customers in the cafe.

On the informants' etic level, the Grove provides good food; but from an emic level, good food is not the main attraction. Rather, the freedom of choosing one's space where individualization is expressed. An informal and homelike atmosphere which provide relief from work and socialization, and being treated with respect all become a part of their desire to visit the Grove frequently.

CHAPTER V

REDESIGN OF THE GROVE CAFE

Provided with the design and cultural analysis generated in Chapter IV, new design can be suggested based on the existing Grove's design weakness and its cultural information. In this chapter, redesign of the Grove is generated through a series of creative thinking strategies: manipulation, abstraction, and transformation.

Two and a-half years ago, the Grove underwent a partial interior remodeling. The owner did not change the cafe's exterior features nor any kitchen equipment or layout, but he rearranged seating and purchased new carpeting. The changes occurred because the owner was interested in quicker turn-over and more seats; aesthetics were not a concern.

After analyzing the Grove's design character, I believe that its major limitation is that the cafe is unable to articulate its identity clearly. Although its facade has multi-colored bricks which are unusual, the cafe's other elements (signs, graphics, openings, aesthetics) fail to make it a place of its own.

In order to redesign the exterior and interior so that its expression as a cafe is clearer, I proceeded to explore alternatives, using the creative thinking strategies of manipulation (generating multiple images), abstraction (abstracting design elements, giving them their own symbolic meanings), and transformation (metaphorical thinking).

Using manipulation, abstraction, and transformation, my design ideas for the facade can be broken down into three categories: 1) openness motif; 2) architectural plane motif; and 3) symbolic meanings.

These design ideas for the facade are summarized in Figures 30, 31, 32.

After reviewing the preceding facade designs, I chose a design that serves as a metaphor, one that was richly embedded with symbolic meaning during the design process. Figure 33 reveals how I conceptualized the design.

Although the public may never be aware of the details of conceptual or metaphorical thinking that comprised my design, the building's new facade will be opened to interpretation. Hopefully, the layperson will see the variety of materials as a layering of time, or perhaps, as a peeling away of the Grove's elements. They might view it as a construction project in progress, or even as a joke, but I hope that they think that it is a unique cafe with its own character and culture.

In addition to the redesign of the facade, I concentrated on redesigning the existing sign's logotype, in an effort to strengthen its expression of simplicity of the cafe's character.

While there are many typographic "styles," architectural lettering serves one purpose--public display. It invites attention by its situation and size, yet it has no standard rules in terms of its expressiveness. Emotions are freely expressed with letter forms.

Too often, design for signs is determined to be successful as long as it is legible. But legibility depends upon many factors; the size and

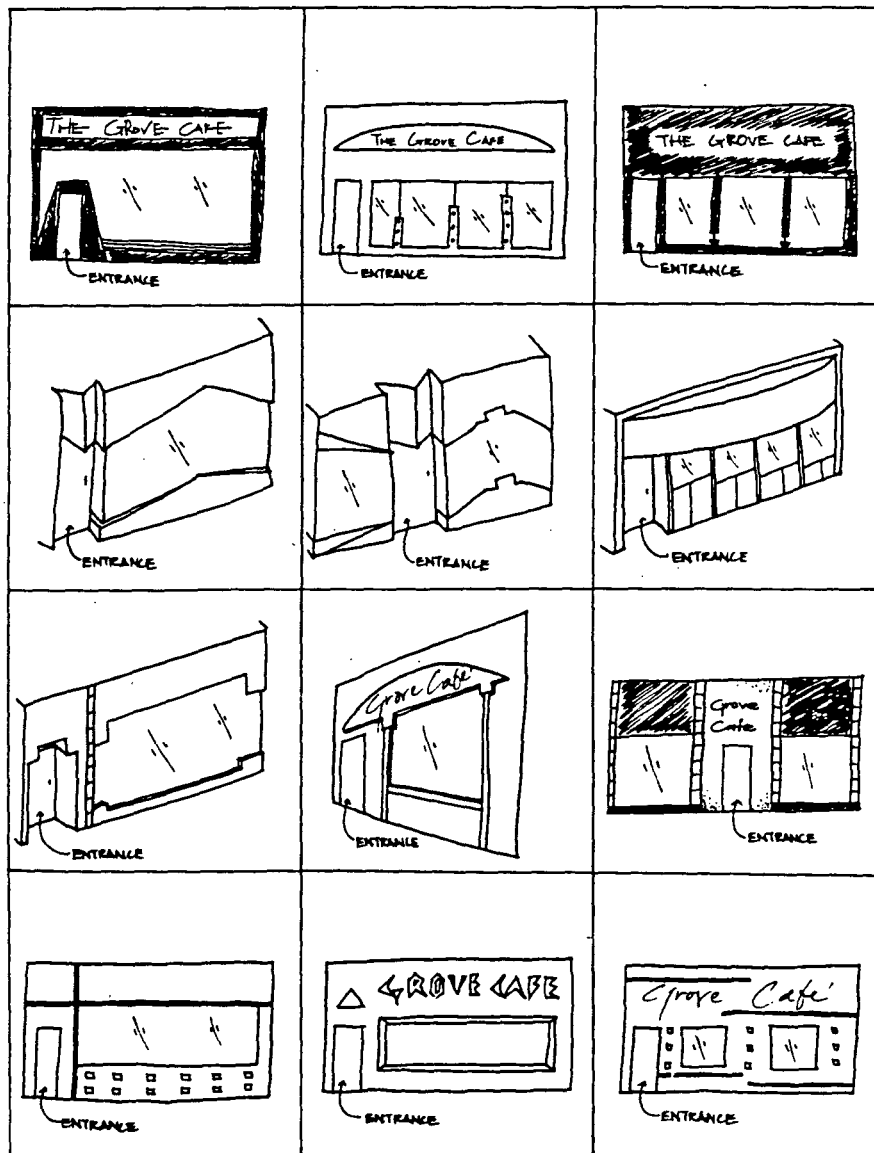
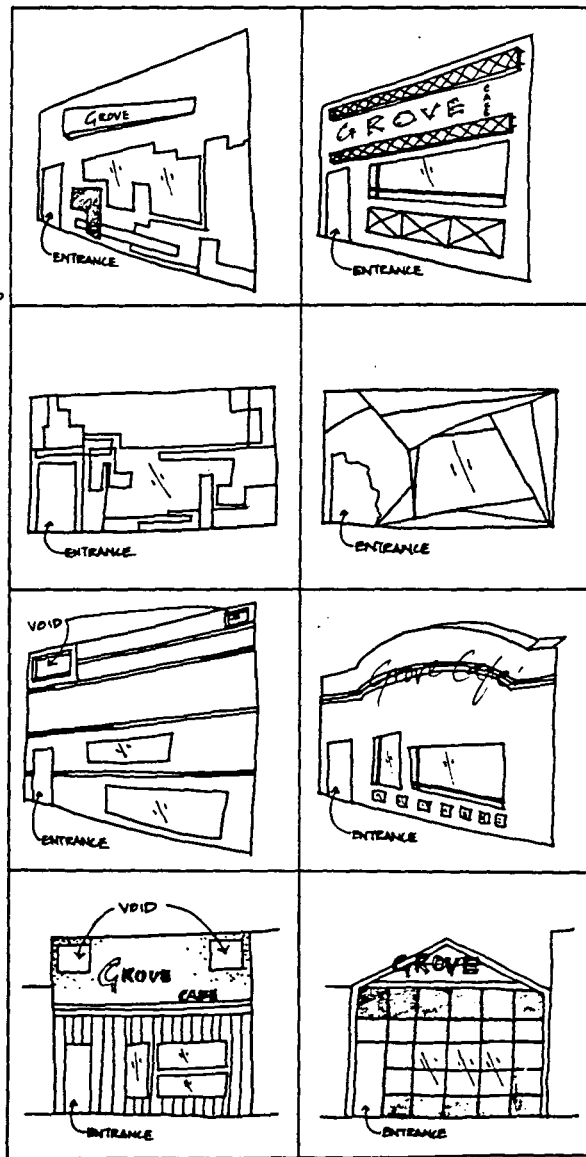


Figure 30 Facade: Openness motif

LAYERING THE PLANES



CHANGING THE PROPORTIONS

Figure 31 Facade: Playing with architectural planes

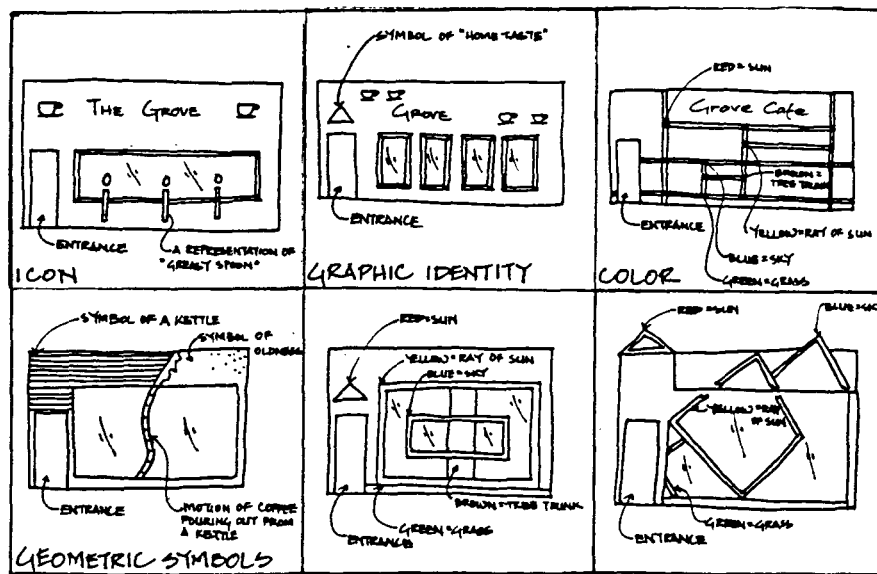


Figure 32 Facade: Symbolic meaning

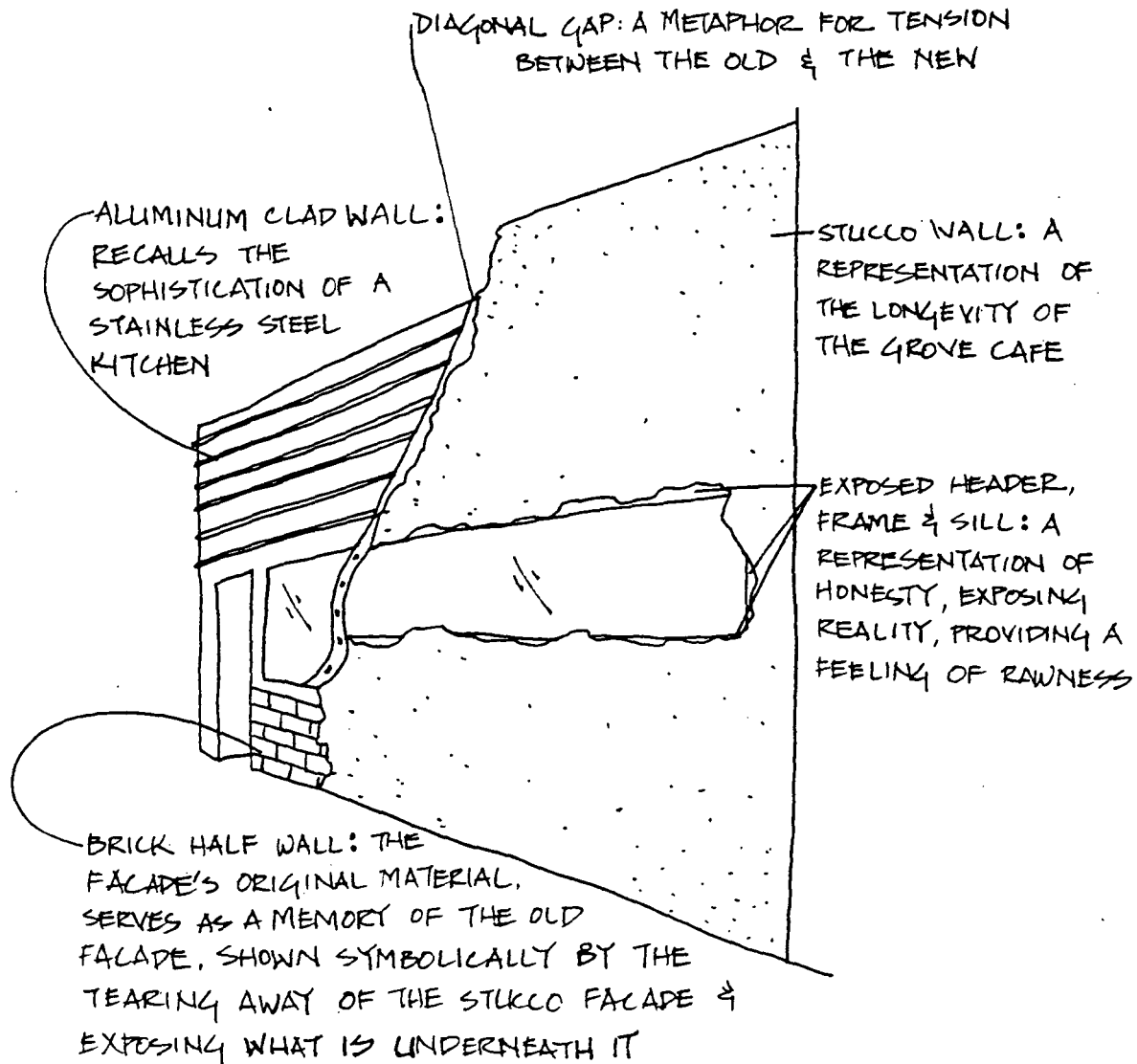


Figure 33 Proposed new design for the Grove's frontal facade

type of lettering, the background material, the contrast between the background and the lettering, the sign's relation to the observer (such as the height above eye level), and the content of the message.

Whether certain letters are easier to read than others depends also on experience, since reading consists of relating what one sees with what one has learned, that is, what one recognizes. But legibility is a very elusive quality, because there is a shifting norm, corresponding in part to people's changing habits as they adjust to new typographic fashions.

Whether a sign is legible or not is hard to define, but there are four guidelines which prove helpful. They are: *conspicuity*, the level of contrast between the letters and their surroundings (a matter of hue, tone, shape, pattern, or layout); *letter design*, which depends on the importance of stroke thickness, white spaces in the middle of letters (negative strokes), color of background and serifs; *word design*, whether the letters are all capitalized, lowercase, or combinations of the two.

(One can characterize capitals as formal and authoritative; lowercase as informal and conversational); and *space design*, concerning how letters relate with each other. By using these guidelines, I explored multiple ideas for sign designs which would express the character of the Grove and be compatible with its redesigned facade (Figure 34).

The following design (Figure 35) was selected because it suggests movement and liveliness--which represents the urbanity of the downtown and townlife where local people eat and meet each other. The purpose of large capitals to begin each word is to catch one's attention and to emphasis energy and strength. The color of the surface

	<p>THE GROVE CAFE</p> <p>CONDENSED</p>	<p>The Grove Cafe</p> <p>GENTLE</p>
<p>GROVE CAFE</p> <p>FLOWERY</p>	<p>The Grove Cafe</p> <p>CONTEMPORARY</p>	<p>THE GROVE CAFE</p> <p>COW-BOY</p>
<p>GROVE CAFE</p> <p>MOVEMENT</p>	<p>Grove Cafe</p> <p>ROMANTIC</p>	<p>THE GROVE CAFE</p> <p>NOT SURPRISING</p>
<p>THE GROVE CAFE</p> <p>INDIVIDUALIZED</p>	<p>THE GROVE CAFE</p> <p>MOTION OF RAPIDNESS</p>	<p>THE GROVE CAFE</p> <p>PLAYFUL</p>

Figure 34 Signs and their expressions

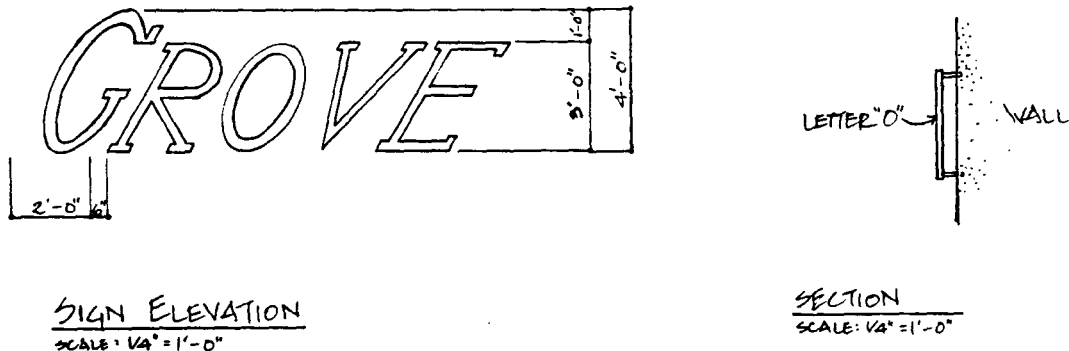


Figure 35 The proposed new sign

of the sign should also apply to its sides and back, wrapping the sign up. Dark brown as a background color is appropriate because it is symbolic to brewed coffee.

Generating several designs was also important for the interior. The owner is especially concerned with the seating layout, because he desires a quicker turnover and maximum seating opportunity. Moving the open kitchen would not only be expensive but not efficient, so the kitchen location remained where it was. Therefore, the internal planning relied more on seating and circulation.

The following objectives for the open kitchen were used in the redesign: effective space utilization, flow of work through the kitchen, workers' safety, and effective labor utilization. But in order to accomplish the objectives, it was important to determine the amount of required equipment, the required space and a workable layout, and to evaluate that layout.⁴⁷ The determination for required equipment was

⁴⁷ Geraldine Mary Montag, "Layout and Design of Quality Food Service Facilities" (Master thesis, Iowa State University, 1966), 1.

based primarily on a restaurant's menu, the amount, type, and portions to be served.

The determination of required space is a very individual matter since there are no fixed rules, however, the guidelines suggested that:

- 1) At least 4 feet of linear travel should be allowed for each employee engaged in food preparation.
- 2) Space should be allowed for clearances around and above equipment for easy operation, cleaning, and maintenance. Heavy equipment should be sealed to the wall for sanitary purposes or have a clearance of 18-24 inches from the wall for both sanitary and cleaning purposes.
- 3) At least 48 inches should be provided in front of ovens so that workers will not be crowded when doors are opened and hot items are removed.
- 4) Food should travel the shortest possible distance and the labor performed should involve a minimum of walking. Main production lines should be short and reasonably straight.
- 5) As the primary manufacturing line, the cooking section should be placed near one side wall or partition. Routing should be arranged from left to right or from right to left, but the left to right flow is generally more comfortable for the worker.⁴⁸

When designing a commercial kitchen, the cooking section should always be considered first because it is the main production area. In a small establishment like the Grove cafe, it is often convenient to place

⁴⁸ Montag, 8-9.

the cooking section near one side wall and to arrange the other sections so that the routing is from left to right. Baking is done in the back kitchen rather than at the open kitchen because the nature of work in the baking section is fairly simple in terms of transporting supplies, which makes it possible to be located remotely. There is plenty of counter space around the cooking section, serving as support surfaces for plates and cooking utensils. Dishwashing is done at the back kitchen with plenty of counter space around it for loading and sorting. After analysis, the original straight line kitchen configuration is a wise solution to this rectangular box (Figure 36).

There is a strong relationship between the entrance and the interior circulation, because the entrance establishes the path. In the Grove, this major path is heavy with traffic and obstruction is often the case. Currently, the Grove's path is not quite linear, due to a jog after the entry (Figure 37). I believe that the path should be straightened to conform with the long and narrow configuration of the Grove's interior space. Additionally, a direct path is more desirable because it is

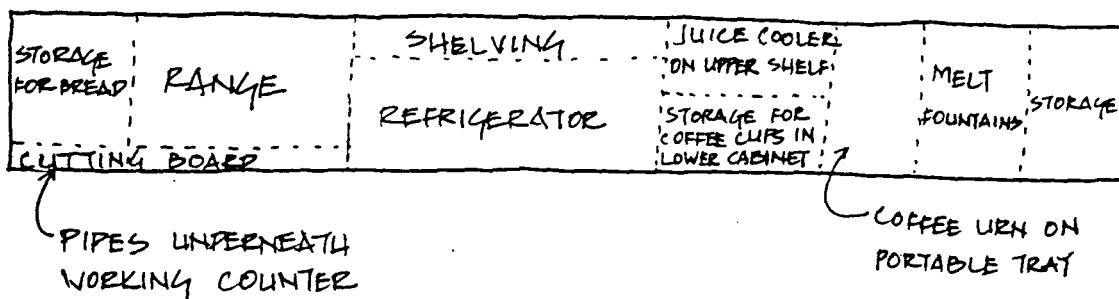


Figure 36 Existing equipment layout for the Grove's open kitchen

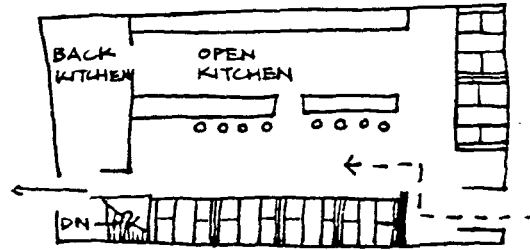


Figure 37 A jog after the entry

inviting, and, in terms of safety, it is easily accessible to exit doors in case of fire. The existing booth seating in the Grove captured the character of friendliness, where small groups of conversational parties can be formed in a more private setting, (where the backs of the booths are high enough to screen off most divisions of sight and sound). Its weakness is that patrons are unlikely to share booths with unknown people. Therefore, I generated several alternative designs for a side or central relocation of the Grove's entrance and seating arrangement in relationship to the circulation path (Figures 38, 39).

The path in the current Grove is only guided by the placement of booths and tables that are placed along the walls (Figure 40). But a path is important because it invites people to enter into a space. In a public space, the path should be directional, leading one into the space without hesitation. A path can be made directional through the use of signs, lighting, finishes and furnishings, or architecture (Figure 41).

In regard to its back facade, a subtle amount of tension is expressed between the front and the back because they are not compatible. I generated several design ideas for the back facade which

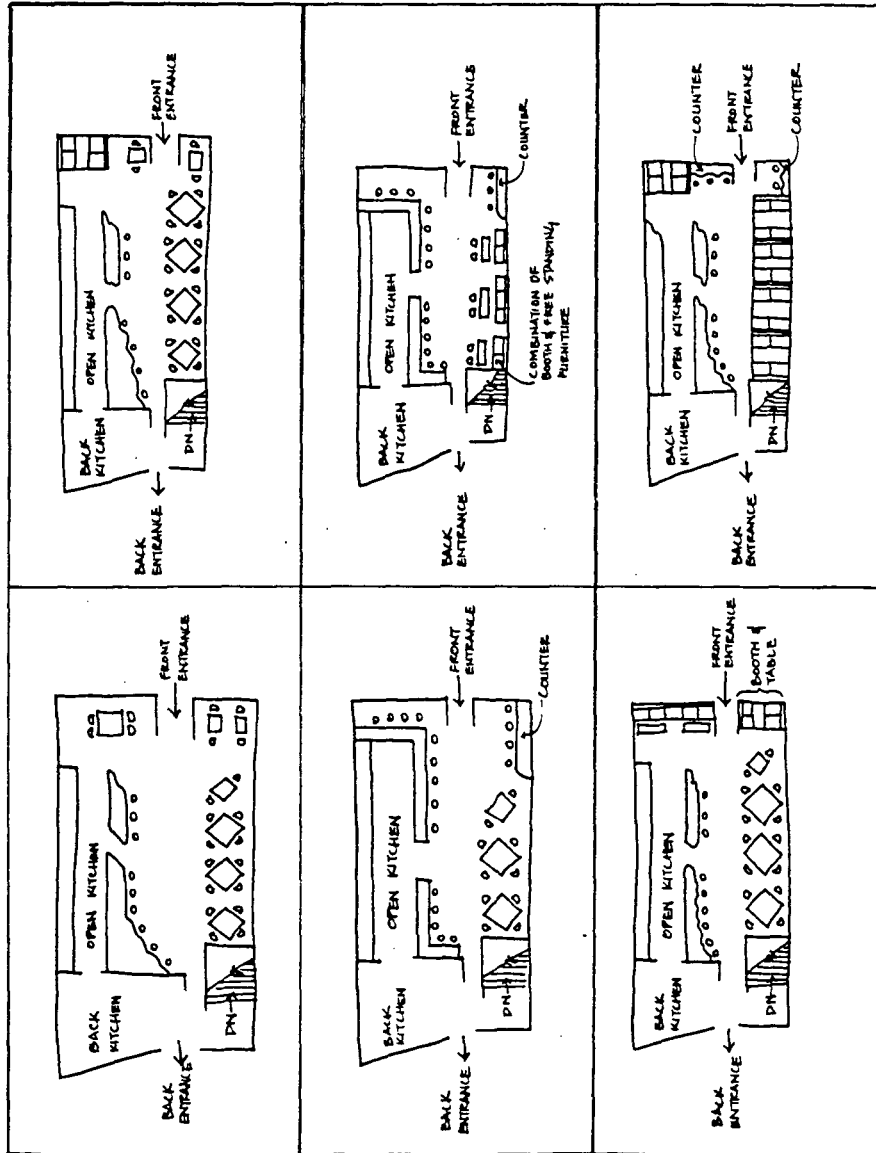


Figure 38 Central entrance

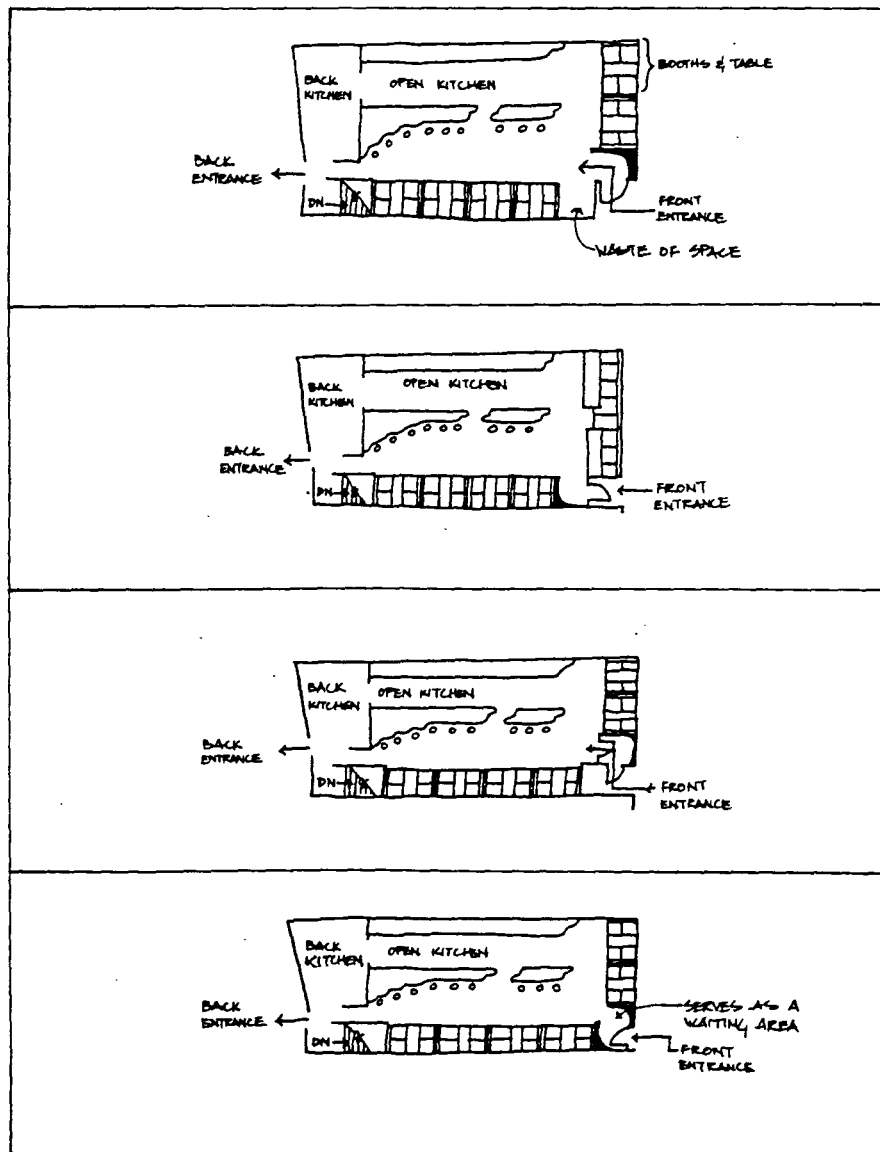


Figure 39 Side entrance

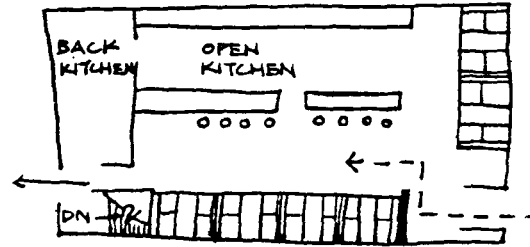


Figure 40 Indirect path found in the Grove

would link not only the front and the back in a similar motif, but which also spoke to the issues of old and new. In other words, I sought unity between these two issues (Figure 42).

In terms of its interior finishes and furnishings, I sought finishes that were appropriate to the character of the cafe, such as vinyl tiles (a replacement of historic linoleum) for flooring, laminate for the serving counter, stucco for the symbolic expression of concrete, and vinyl surfaces for seats.

In terms of its interior color, I looked for rather plain, simple, and subdued colors that would enhance the character of the cafe.

This chapter summarizes design ideas for the elements of the front and back facades, signs, entrance location, interior circulation, and finishes, furnishings, and colors. Although the creative thinking strategies of manipulation, abstraction, and transformation were used to generate alternative designs, the final design choice depended on the strength of the elements existential expression.

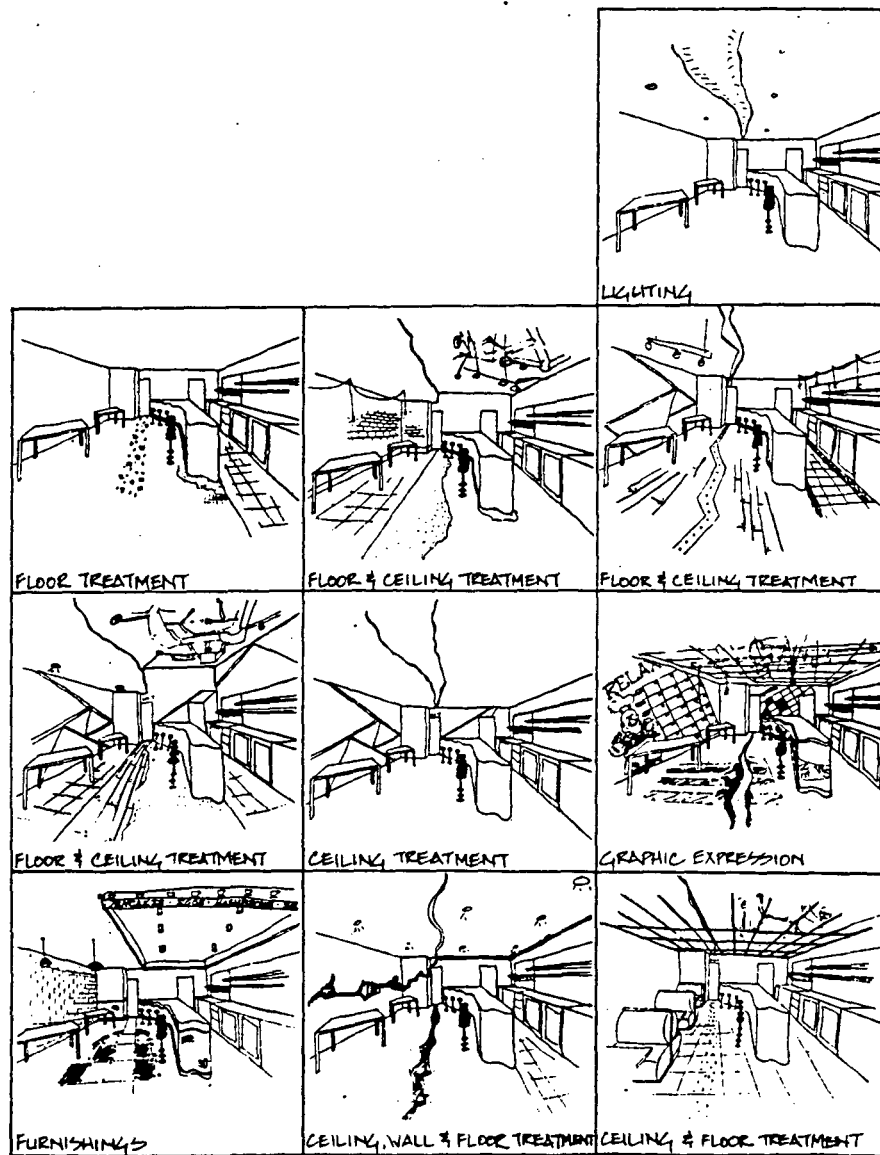


Figure 41 Path identification

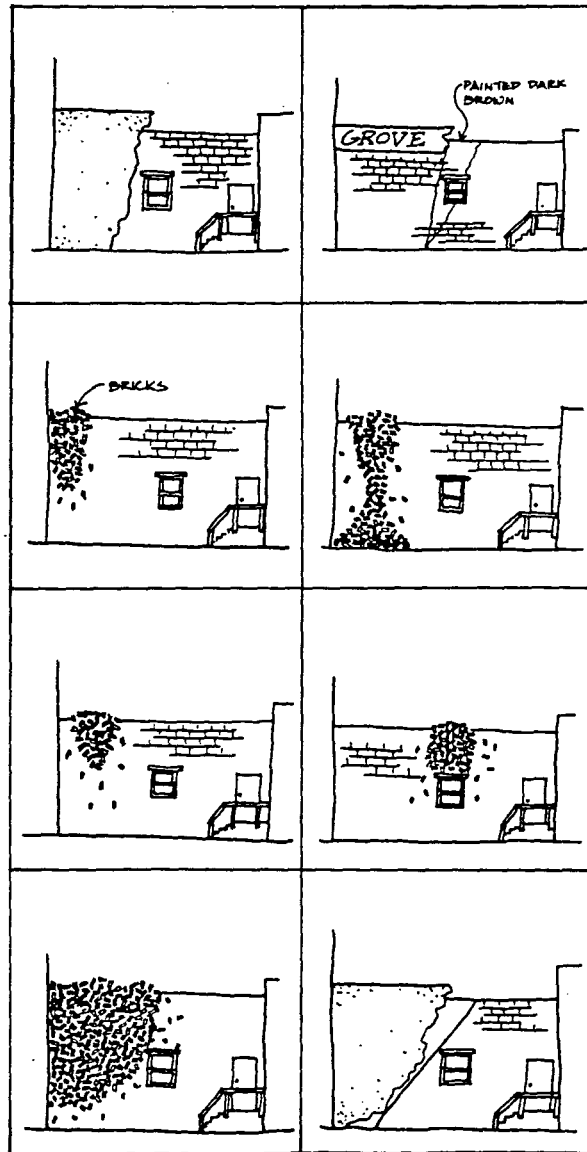


Figure 42 Back facade

CHAPTER VI

DESIGN CONCLUSIONS OF THE GROVE CAFE

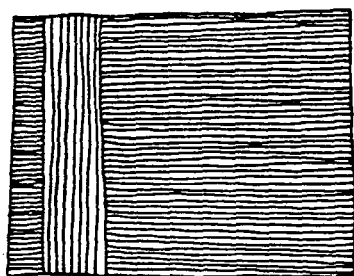
The creative thinking strategies (manipulation, abstraction and transformation) guided me in generating multiple ideas for both interior and exterior. Choosing the most appropriate design for the cafe is not a matter of style, or taste, but rather, a true understanding of the space and the message that design conveys. In this stage of the design process, the principles and elements of design, and expressive design theories were used to make a final decision about the design.

Front facade

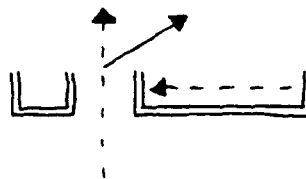
The concept that I am using is "tension" which represents the conflict between the new and the old. It is eye-catching in the tradition of storefront businesses and roadside cafes. The scheme is also full of symbolic meaning, in how I conceived it, and how it may be interpreted by the public. The concept also implies, through an asymmetrical adaptation, the informality that exists within the Grove as a cultural reality.

Across the threshold, one is led in indirectly; we gravitate toward the strongest corner which most clearly characterizes the interior as a secure place, manifesting the intention of our motion inwards. The asymmetrical entry also elicits a more private character than does a symmetric placement (Figure 43).⁴⁹ Since the door in the Grove sits deeply in the opening, it helps reinforce this private character.

⁴⁹ Thiis-Evensen, 125.



THE ASYMMETRICAL FACADE



THE ASYMMETRICAL ENTRANCE

Figure 43 The asymmetrical facade

According to the State safety code, all exterior entrances need to swing out towards the street. The Grove's front and back entrances are not an exception, both doors swing outward bringing the interior space out towards us. Both are hinged on the left, allowing us to encounter the strong part of the space.⁵⁰

The front facade represents a richness in the variety and use of materials. Three-dimensional layering effects are achieved through the use of protruded aluminum strips, signs, and the color contrast between stucco and multi-colored bricks. The facades new three dimensionality breaks the uniform, flush surface of the old facade, giving it character and depth rather than a neutralized facade. Blinds are not suggested for the interior. The two horizontal windows are heightened to line up with the height of the exterior entrance, carrying the element of a line running across the facade. Both windows are fashioned asymmetrically, with the left window having an opening that is bigger than the right. Besides being a clean-edged window, the left window serves as a

⁵⁰ Thiis-Evensen, 289-291.

communication device for the people to look through and into the interior. The right window not only has jagged edges but is also smaller and closed-off from outside view at the lower part in comparison to the left window opening. It serves three purposes: to maintain an asymmetrical integrity (informality) that exists within the Grove as a cultural reality; to maintain the elements of the jaggedness of stucco; and to secure the patrons that are sitting next to this opening, giving them privacy and a sense of protection to their space.

Interior

After experimenting with a direct path into the interior, I decided that it was best to leave it in its original place because relocating it would decrease the amount seating possibilities in the cafe. Also, the vacant space that is beside the entrance will serve as a waiting area. The new long curved partition wall in the entrance serves two functions: as a guide to lead patrons into the space, and at the same time, it works as an air-lock device (blocking off cold air from coming into the interior during winter; and screening warm air from coming into the interior in the summer). Patrons sitting behind this wall can put their personal belongings on a shelf, which was created from the left-over space behind the partition. The two curved walls have jagged tops, bringing the facade theme into the interior. Booths are kept, not only because they provide private seating areas, but also because they maintain the original form of the place. Red is used for the color of the booths replacing dark brown, because it is a vibrant color associated

with lively commerce, and it is a color that moves "within itself". Its power is to be found in a sort of contained potential because it radiates and glows maturely within itself and does not shine forth aimlessly.⁵¹ Entering the space, one is guided on an asymmetrical path which is reinforced on the ceiling. Existing acoustical tiles are left in place, except for a corner where they are removed to reveal the original high ceiling of the Grove. The ceiling expresses the tension between the old and the new, while maintaining its ability to absorb sound.

Two eating counters in a wave-like form have ends that terminate at an angle, bringing the rapid motion found on the exterior into the interior. There is a break between the serving counters for the owners to pass through for accessible serving. The serving counters are dark brown, symbolically representing coffee, with the mini grids representing the dripping of coffee. The same colors and motifs are repeated on the booth tables, tying both sides of the cafe together.

The two long interior walls are without any decoration; they are painted white, representing purity and neutrality. The two long walls maintain a feeling of simplicity and represent the historical integrity of the 1920s cafe, when plain, white walls were sanitary.

However, the two short narrow walls receive a decorative treatment because they parallel the back of the front facade and the back facade. Like a puzzle, the front facade's back is really the interior front wall, and four walls help move the front motif through the space and out again. The outer wall, which belongs to the exterior, and the

⁵¹ Thiis-Evensen, 294.

inner wall, which belongs to the interior, are combined in such a way that they delimit the space independently. It is a *plane on plane layering*, with two solid planes juxtaposing each other.⁵² Abstracting the transformation of the outer plane into the inner plane not only adds interest but also helps identify the existential character of each wall, which in return, makes up the boundary of the space. Wood veneer is used on these two walls because wood indicates a termination of space, and it is also warm and breaks up the coldness radiated by the two long white walls (Figure 44). The idea of having two white walls and two decorative walls is to reinforce informality found in the Grove.

Vinyl is used as the new flooring material in the Grove. It is connected to the surrounding walls, enclosing the volume totally, defining the space as a self-contained world of its own.⁵³ It acts as a detached floor, not a part of the ground and independent on its own. It has a smooth tactile quality; and has a non-permanent association as something which covers and protects the ground beneath it.⁵⁴ Vinyl is the current material which replaced linoleum widely used in the 1920s

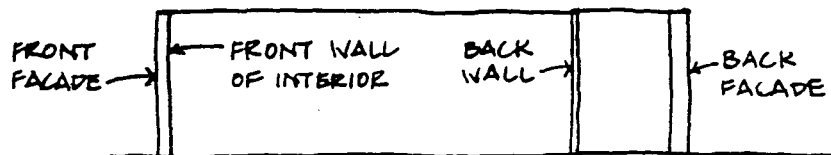


Figure 44 Section of interior and exterior walls

⁵² Thiis-Evensen, 157.

⁵³ Thiis-Evensen, 47.

⁵⁴ Thiis-Evensen, 59.

in many food institutions. In terms of its function, it is a good deadener of sound, it is easily cleaned and maintained. I have chosen to lay the 12" by 12" tiles as a grid, in a response to the rectangular acoustical tiles on the ceiling. A cool grey color is used, giving the floor a more solid look, which associates itself closely with the ground expression (Figure 45).

Roof

The interior ceiling reinforces the circulation path but it also has its own existential expression, and a relationship with the exterior roof (Figure 46). Because of the metaphorical explosive force caused by tension, some of the acoustical tiles have been blown off from the suspended ceiling, exposing the truth that lies behind it--the living mechanical system that lives behind the tile. This force manifested itself all the way through the ceiling to the roof where grey paint is represented as a crack.

Back facade

The metaphorical tension has died down when it reaches the back, exploding only part of it, where a lump of bricks represents what is left of the explosion. The back facade is repainted in white, enhancing the chances for shadowing and reinforcing a three-dimensional effect.

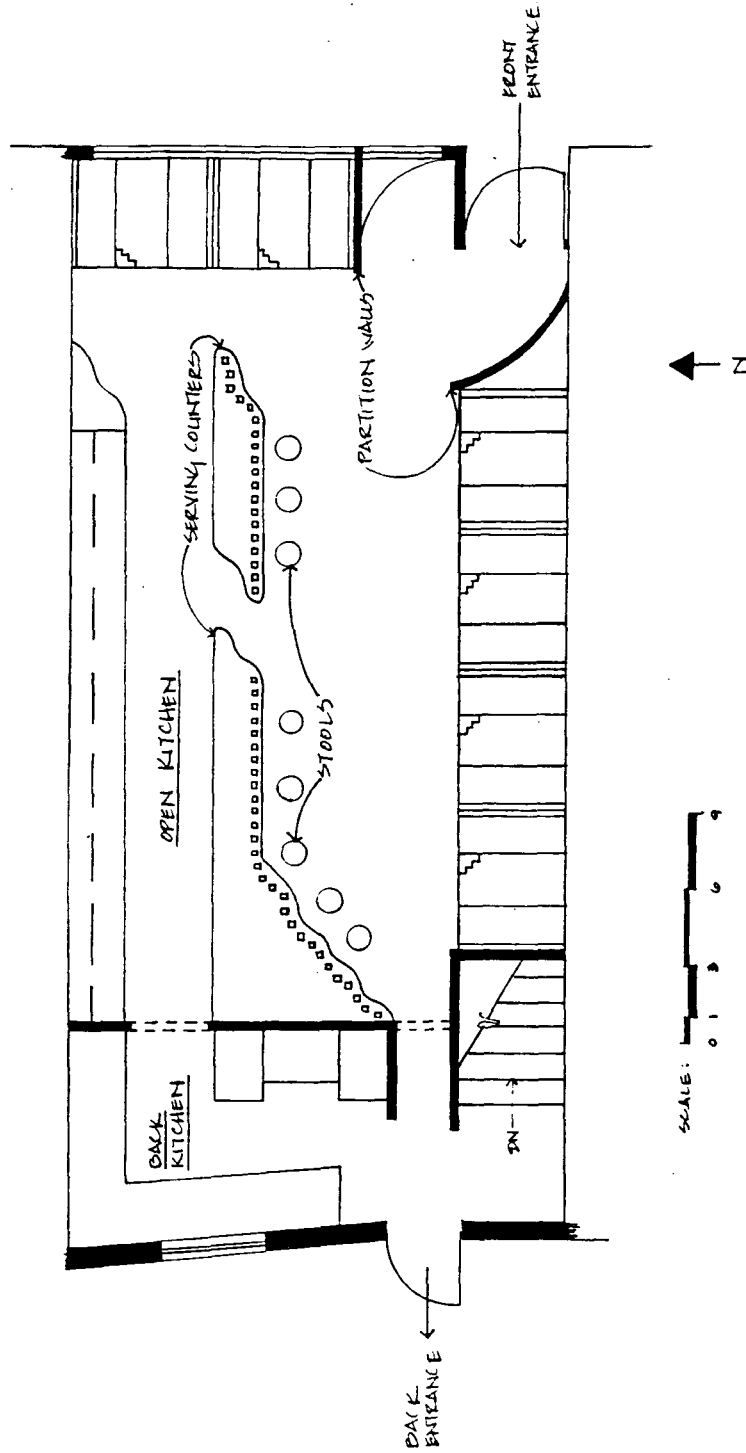


Figure 45 Proposed new design

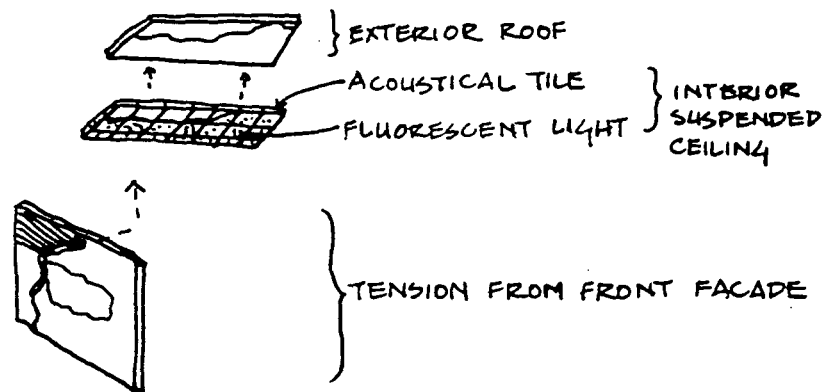


Figure 46 Expression of the exterior roof

Summary

In my search for the character of the Grove cafe, Thiis-Evensen's study offered me the possibility of finding the elements that compose the existential quality of the building, while Spradley and McCurdy offered me an understanding of the culture and human interaction that are found in the Grove. Informality is accomplished through the use of asymmetrical balance, with the existing booths and wood veneer maintaining the warmth of the place, serving customers from both categories: white-collar and working class patrons.

A livable place is not just a space that is designed mainly for human comfort, but is also a space that has its own life.

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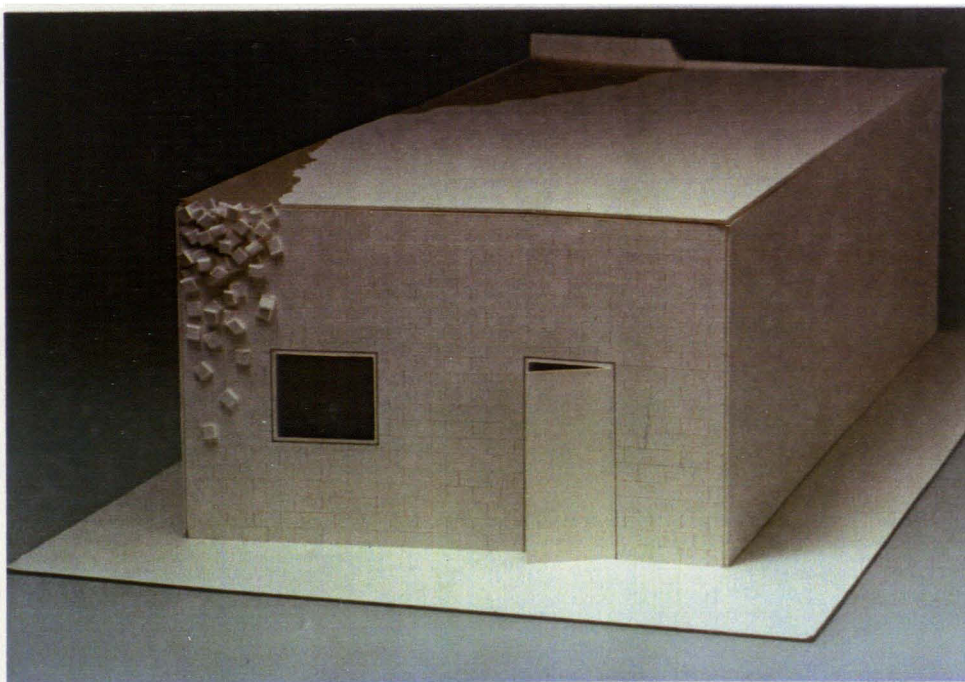
I wish to express my gratitude to the members of my graduate committee, David Gradwohl and Gary Tartakov, for their insights to this subject. In particular, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my major professor, Jan Jennings, for her considerable comments, guidance, patience and encouragement. And finally, my thanks for the love and support of my boyfriend Raymond Leung, and the Lord my God during the writing of this thesis.

APPENDIX

PICTURES OF THE NEW DESIGN ON THE GROVE CAFE



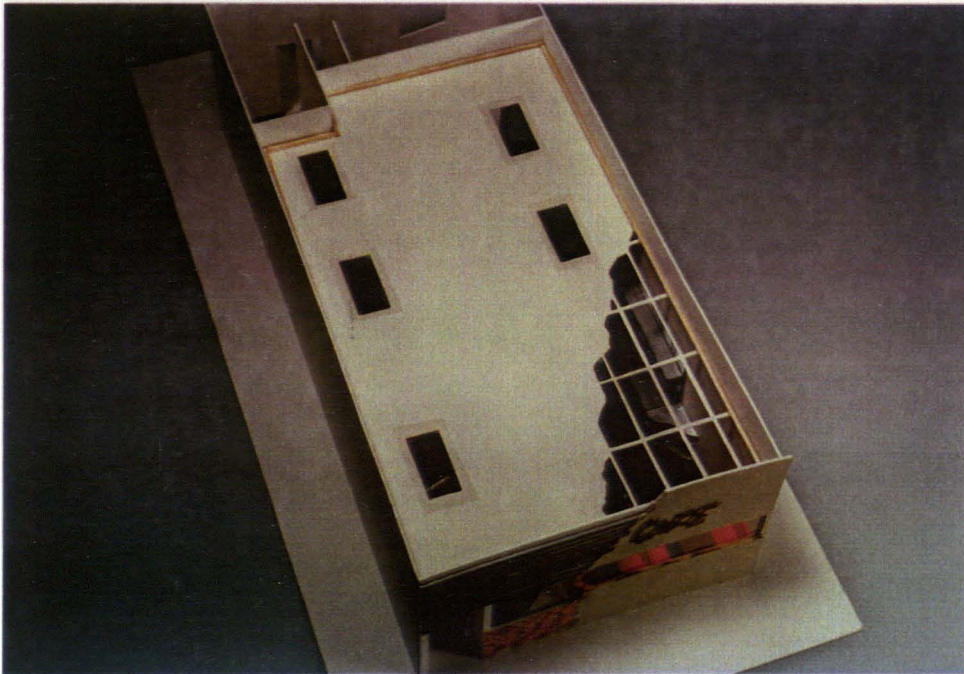
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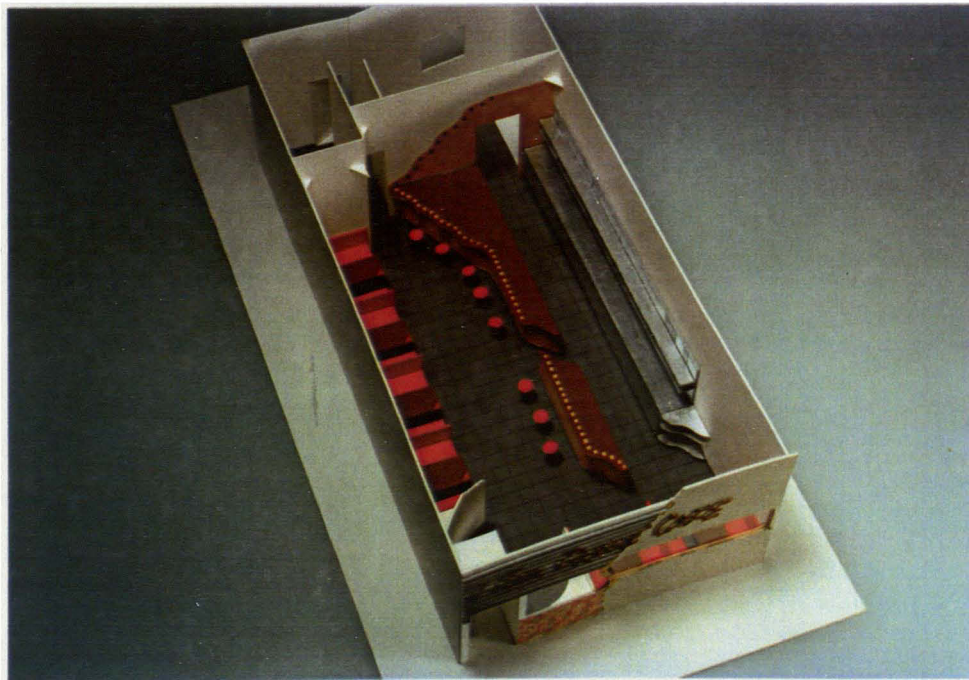
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Figure A Grove's new front facade

Figure B Grove's new back facade



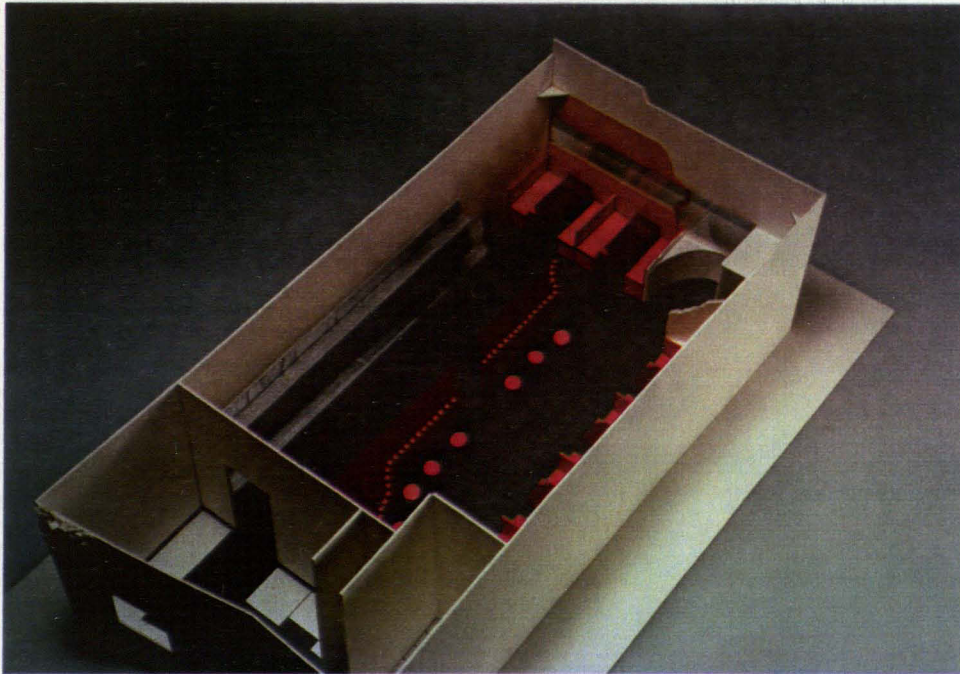
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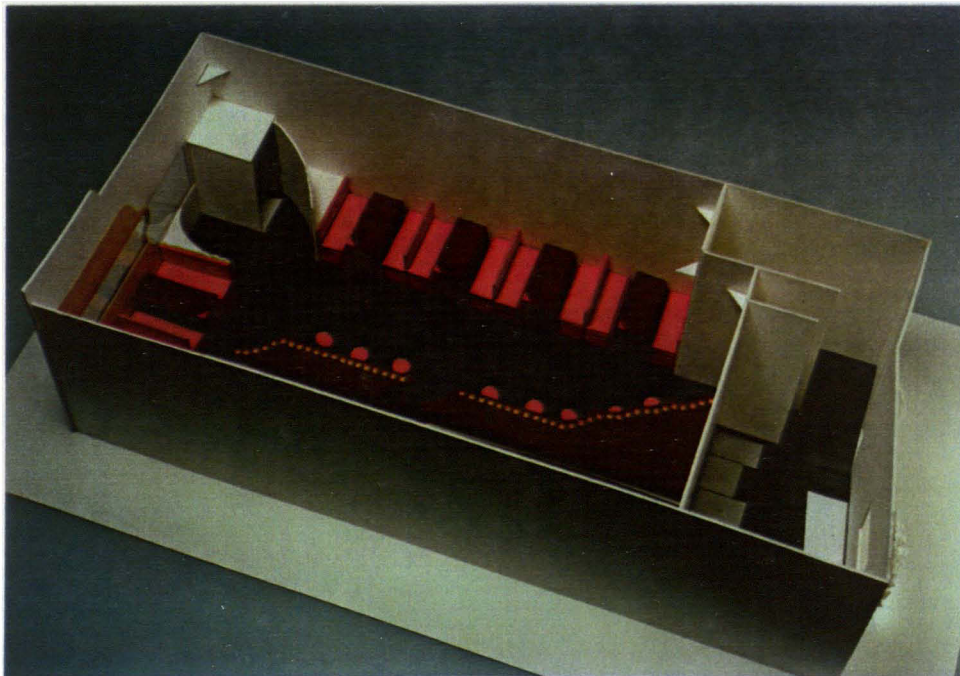
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Figure C Grove's interior ceiling

Figure D Grove's interior plan



E



F

Figure E Grove's interior plan

Figure F Grove's waiting area